A POWERFUL NEW SERIAL HAS JUST COMMENCED.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 387. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 30TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).

Whereas, in launching forth our New Production, THE "PRUDENTIAL" CARPETS AND HEARTHRUGS, we beg to state they will have a Rich Turkish and Persian Design on one side, and on the reverse the elegant and costly designs of Wilton make. The advantage thus gained is great, as they can be utilised in various rooms at one cost. This is a valuable step in economy.

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE

"PRUDENTIAL" Reversible CARPETS

(Registered.)

Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th, 1896.

The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpets she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd.

Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

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100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

(*Registered*). **GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.**

Sale Price 2/11 EACH.

This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, the largest ever sold at the Price.

Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, 10d. extra.

SPECIAL OFFER. 2 Carpets and 2 Rugs ... ... 7s. 3d.

Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

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(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

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REV. C. HAVERGAL

(Nephew of the late Miss Frances Ridley Havergal)

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☞ The **WIND PILLS** being **Purely Vegetable, Tasteless** and **Mild,** and **Tonic** in their action, may be taken with perfect safety by the most delicate of either sex.

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TAKES BALL, SHOT, AND NOISELESS CARTRIDGES.

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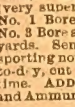

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S.S. S.S.

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No. 22

May 30, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

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A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

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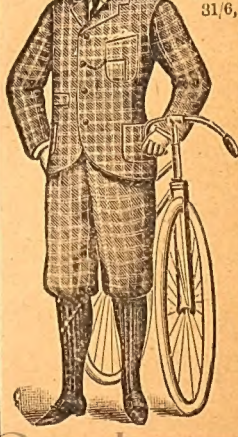

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All Goods Carriage Paid.

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

SHORT STORIES

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 387.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending May 30th, 1896.

THE POTTER'S WHEEL.

"VOILÀ! Jeanne," said M. Damasin, the foreman, "here is your fellow workman. He will keep your clay moist and make the lumps ready for your pretty fingers, and you must teach him yourself how it is done."

The wheel stopped, and Jeanne Carteret glanced up from her task at her future help-mate. Her grey eyes had a preoccupied look, but when they fell upon the quaint figure standing apologetically before her they forthwith danced with merriment. For lo! he was none other than the strange, mystical M. Personne—M. Personne, about whom every tongue in the little village had been wagging for many a day, and who was in himself a veritable enigma.

For in the springtime, when all the world was young and Nature laughed aloud in sheer delight at being there, a stranger strode into the little township of Arranches (which lies, as all the world knows, just across the Swiss frontier under the shadow of the Jura). He was very tall and thin, and though his face was strangely refined and his eyes gentle and luminous, his hair beneath the shabby hat was long and unkempt and his beard was ragged. His clothes he might have exchanged with the first scarecrow to the detriment of the latter. His boots were travel-stained and worn, and he carried in his hand the attenuated valise with which a Frenchman would start to the North Pole; he had evidently walked far and was very weary.

A strange apparition, truly, and one which scarcely recommended itself to mine host of the "Three Squirrels," where, in a singularly soft voice, and with a bow that would have befitted an ambassador, the wanderer requested a bed for a night and some supper. The landlord hesitated, but the casual production of a little bag of golden louis allayed his apprehension, and convinced him that his guest was, after all, one of those strange people with whom the outward evidences of respectability carry little weight. So the enigmatical stranger found shelter.

Not for one night only, but for many days he continued to stay at the "Three Squirrels," paying each evening for the charges for the day, and exciting an interest in the little town, of which he was fortunately in nowise cognisant.

For, curious as was his appearance, his mode of life was no less unconventional. At noon each day, he emerged from the inn, mounted the steep hillside behind the town, and, shading his keen dark eyes, scanned the glazed, white roads that lay right and left in endless perspective. Then he would press his hand upon his forehead, heave a sigh of relief, and return to the porch of the "Three Squirrels." He gave no name, hence the gossips in the village christened him M. Personne; nor did he once betray whither he was going, or whence he came; but his scant store of linen was of exquisite texture, and his shabby brown wide-awake hat bore the name of a Paris manufacturer. He talked to few and only when forced into conversation. His remarks upon intellectual generalities, when, for example, chatting with the village Curé, were brilliant and instructive; but of the subjects in which most are interested—contemporary politics, literature, and the like—he was strangely ignorant. But to all alike, rich or poor, he invariably evinced the most exquisite courtesy, and the children of Arranches simply worshipped him. Thus matters went on for several weeks, until the landlord of the "Three Squirrels" had long since ceased to trouble his busy brain about the mysterious M. Personne, or to doubt that the store of golden louis was not inexhaustible.

This condition, however, of beautiful trustfulness was doomed to be rudely shattered, for one morning M. Personne entered the landlord's little office and said very simply:

"My good landlord, I fear my most agreeable sojourn is at an end. I have but ten minutes left unless—unless," he added hesitatingly, and looked half pathetically at the landlord's face.

But the latter did not give his luckless guest time to state the hypothetical alternative.

"He was *désolé*—completely *désolé*. He loved monsieur greatly; monsieur was good and kind. But times were so hard, and the Communal taxes so high,

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and the phylloxera had so ravaged the vineyards, that, in fact——"

"So be it, friend," said M. Personne sadly. "I will wander forth once more with ten noble louis in my purse, and sweet recollections of little Arranches and the 'Three Squirrels' in my heart. Yet gladly would I stay," he continued, and he darted a quick glance down the long road, and gave an involuntary little shudder. "I am very happy. Could I not earn some money somewhere—somehow? I am strong, though I am so thin, and once on a day knew something—at least, I fancy so."

The landlord shook his head. These white hands had never done manual labour; there was no demand for such intellectual skill as M. Personne undoubtedly possessed. And yet what a customer he had been!—four francs a day, and always paid at nightfall. And so gentle, and so magnanimous in the matter of "extras." It would be a pity to lose him.

Now it so happened that on that very evening there came to the "Three Squirrels" M. Damasin, the foreman of the pottery works which form the industry in Arranches. They were but poor little works, wherein was made just simple ware in use among the peasants of the district. But M. Damasin was a prescient and ambitious man, and foresaw possibilities of greatness in the Arranches pottery.

The little town had already been discovered by the globe-trotting English, whither they sought shelter from the scorching heat of Geneva; and wherever English people go they buy things. The clay of the district was singularly good. And, lastly, M. Damasin had discovered that he possessed among his work people one true artist, whose exquisite skill, recognised by himself alone, was wasted, but who could be depended upon to rise to her opportunities. This girl, Jeanne Carteret, had for the last two years "thrown" most of the pottery in the Arranches works—that is to say, hers was the task of molding the lump of wet clay as it lay upon the potter's wheel into the cup, saucer, ewer, or whatever was being made—a delicate art truly, and one for which the poor peasant girl was rarely gifted.

Her control over the plastic mass as it was whirled upwards on the revolving disc was complete, the manipulation of her fingers most dexterous; above all her sense of form was poetical and true. The command in the works of labour was as yet limited, and hitherto Jeanne Carteret had herself apportioned the lumps of clay ready to be cast on the potter's wheel.

For the future this was to be changed, and she was to apply herself entirely to the one branch of art for which she, though but a poor peasant, was so exceptionally endowed. To find an assistant, however, was no easy task. The knack of exactly forming the lump to suit the intended article, so that the oven be not encumbered with superfluous clay, was an intuitive faculty granted to few—certainly not easily to be discovered among rough-handed *ouvriers*, so, at least, said M. Damasin to a select audience that evening at the "Three Squirrels," as he disclosed to their wondering ears his cherished scheme.

But his difficulty was the landlord's opportunity. Why not give the mysterious M. Personne a chance? He was clearly a man of education and refinement. His hands were strong and lithe. He was an honest man and not such a fool as he looked, and—he desired immediate employment.

M. Damasin was astonished at the proposal; he liked not mysterious strangers; but then, after all, a workman's value depended on his skill, not his antecedents, and the more he turned it over, the more reasonable did the proposal appear, and so eventually he decided to grant the cadaverous stranger a trial. Thus it was that the wandering scholar and the simple peasant girl sat side by side at the potter's wheel.

"And now, monsieur," said Jeanne, on the very first morning of his education, "what am I to call thee?"

The stranger started, placed his hand across his forehead, and thought. Then his brow grew dark and his eyes troubled, and he said: "Ah, mademoiselle, what you will. It is all so strange—so strange!"

"Then," said Jeanne, with a merry laugh, "I shall call thee what the children do—M. Personne."

"Do they call me that?" he replied, with a sad little laugh. "M. Personne; it is well, then. I fancy I was once some one, but now—well—I am—nobody."

"And now, Monsieur Nobody, thou must do just what I tell thee, and I will teach thee how to make lumps of clay, which is a beautiful art in itself—at least so M. Damasin says, and Jeanne stole a look at M. Personne's bewildered face, and laughed again.

And he, when he saw her sweet, piquant face and merry smile, also laughed, a laugh so soft and musical that Jeanne wondered thereat, as do they who hear for the first time a very sweet melody.

And forthwith she taught him the rudiments of his trade, the consistency at which he was to constantly keep the clay, and the approximate size of the lumps for each particular vessel, and so apt did he become under her gentle tutelage, and so nicely did his long white hands adjudge the weight of clay, that many a day Jeanne had done her allotted task while yet the sun was high in the heavens. And then, when enough of the rough ware had been thrown as could be baked and glazed, she would bring forth the beautiful designs of Etrurian and Pompeiian lamps which M. Damasin had brought her from Paris, and work till closing time for sheer love of art.

And the kindly-natured manager danced with ecstasy as the beautiful form grew into shape round the long, prehensile fingers, and the graceful neck flew upwards from the outward compression, or a dexterous little tap made the soft-lipped mouth. Moreover he had ever a kind word for her strange assistant, whose workman's blouse so belied his gentleness of speech, and whose labour was ever so ungrudgingly proffered. Then in the eventide M. Personne would escort his workmate to her home, and, leaving her with a profound bow, would betake himself to the little garret which the good-natured landlord of the "Three Squirrels" had placed at his disposal.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Jeanne to her friends, "but he is droll! When he hands me the clay he does it like a Grand Duke; and his bows! and his '*Bonsoir, mademoiselle*; may the angels protect thee!' Ah, had I not to work, work, work, I could laugh all day."

But the day came when Jeanne no longer laughed. For, chancing to ask him some trifling question about a vase, he began to tell her many strange things of that world of art of which she was so ignorant, and yet, with artistic instinct, craved to know. And then, again, how strange was his method of imparting this delightful knowledge!—that in itself was interesting. For sometimes he would talk with freedom of beautiful things he had seen in Rome or in Florence, and then suddenly he would stop, make the gesture she knew so well of pressing his hand on his forehead, and then relapse into silence.

That he had travelled much she could see, but

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much of what he related was vague and inconsequent and yet, oh, so absorbing! So no longer did Jeanne laugh at him and make fun of him in a workroom, but rather, when all around were jesting, she would strive to draw out the treasures of that capricious, inexplicable mind. His courtesy, too—so out of place in the rough workroom—no longer moved her merriment, but became a sweet accompaniment of her life, and the hours he sat beside the potter's wheel a tender interlude in her sordid surroundings. Above all, she felt that beautiful protective sense that good-natured women, however lowly born, feel for those who are weak or suffering.

And so it happened that when summer changed to autumn, and the shadows on the hill-side grew daily shorter, and the leaves fell apace, Jeanne began to feel a strange aching void when the ragged M. Personne was away, and a sweet calm when he was by her side.

"Thou, too, wilt be the Grand Duchesse, *petite*," said the other girls. "Ah! take care, Jeanne; lovers who come from nowhere ride away to nowhere."

And Jeanne would blush and make light of their jesting, and in her own tender heart cherish her simple secret. Would he ever know? thought she. Ah, no; she was but a poor peasant girl, and he was surely a great gentleman, for all his ragged clothes. And so every day she bent over her wheel, and beside her on his settle sat the man she had grown to love.

But one morning he did not come; the hours passed, and the clay remained unformed, and at last the strange ws arrived that, the night before, two men had come the "Three Squirrels," and carried away with them M. Personne. The landlord would tell nothing; but the good folk of Arranches knew full well that no one can be removed by force unless the law permits, and they made strange remarks which cut Jeanne to the very heart, and the girls laughed and reminded her of their prophecy.

She said little, but worked and worked all day with desperate intensity. At first she used to cry silently, and her hot tears fell one by one upon the wet clay, but not for long. One cannot indulge in the more tender emotion on twenty francs a week and only one good meal a day. And, after all, there was always the strange hope, to which all women cling, that he would some day come back to her. But her face grew thin and wan, and her grey eyes larger than ever. And good M. Damasin amented the day he admitted the white-handed scarecrow into his works, and he resolved to distract her thoughts from her hopeless love.

"Jeanne," said he one day, "we have taught you all we know, and there is no scope here for further improvement. We are going to extend the works next year, and in the meantime I will send you to Paris, so that you may learn to 'throw' really artistic work before that time comes."

And so in the springtime Jeanne Carteret left her native home and went out to the great world of Paris, and though her heart still ached she felt a restless longing for the new life of art and toil.

Now, it happened that one Sunday in May the kind, good landlady with whom she lived suggested they should go into the Bois de Boulogne, and see all the grand folk go to the races. Jeanne was nothing loth, and so they went forth and watched the stream of carriages and horsemen. One by one they drove by, and Jeanne looked and wondered at the prancing horses and the beautiful dresses of the ladies. Then suddenly a splendidly appointed carriage dashed by them, and Jeanne felt her heart beat, and the blood surge in her cheeks. For sitting in it by the side of a beautiful lady was M. Personne. He was dressed in the height of fashion, his beard was trimmed, but Jeanne recognised him in an instant.

"Madame," cried the poor girl with an effort, "who is that—that gentleman there with the lady? See, he is bowing to the officer on horseback?"

"Oh, that poor droll—that is the Duc de Champfleury; the mad duke they call him. Five years ago he was the most promising man in France, the most noble gentleman, and the most accomplished; but he was hurt in the great railway accident at Basle—his brain was affected and he lost his memory. For some time he was under restraint, not, indeed, that he was ever violent, but because he scarcely realised where he was, or, indeed, who he was, and unprincipled people could influence him for harm; but he escaped in a very wonderful way, and for many months eluded his keepers; they could not discover his whereabouts, but now they say he is almost well again, and his wife, the lady beside him—why, Jeanne, my child, are you fainting? Ah, *mon Dieu!* it is the sun!"

It was not the sun, nor did Jeanne Carteret faint. She merely pressed her hand against her beating heart, and returned home sorrowing.

LE VIER.

To Lady Gardeners! Likewise to Gentlemen! You should get a copy of *Home Notes* for this week. It contains a most Instructive Article on the "HOME CULTURE OF FLOWERS."

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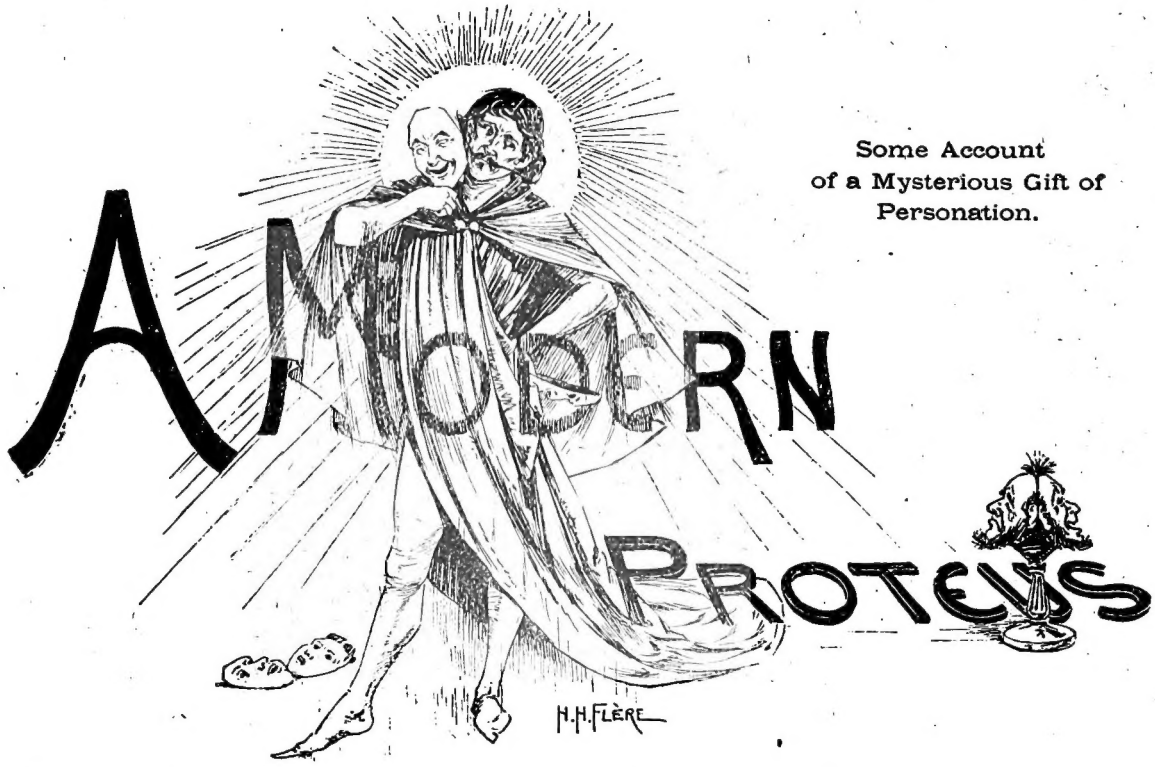

A MODERN PROTEUS

Some Account of a Mysterious Gift of Personation.

IT is now a little more than a week ago since a company of gentlemen were sitting and talking in a certain club—I am not at liberty to say which—in this city. The company numbered some eight or ten persons, three of whom were strangers. I forget how the conversation turned upon the mysterious and occult. I think, however, now that I consider the matter calmly, that the subject was led up to, with a definite purpose, by one of the gentlemen present who had, as it turned out, a very definite object in doing so. At any rate, the topic is one possessing a certain charm for the average human mind, and each of the company was contributing his quotum of information or idea to the general fund.

"Now, take your theosophists," said Robson. "If one can only credit what they claim, they must be possessed of powers which ought to make them masters of any situation, either for good or evil. But what have they done practically in either direction?"

"But then," objected Harding, "one of the conditions of their acquiring control over matter, it must be remembered, is a course of training which practically robs them of the desire to use that control."

"And," put in Thurman, "this course of training is said to so elevate the moral and intellectual nature, as to render an adept incapable of doing an evil action."

"Madame Blavatsky," remarked the cynical Cook, "is, I suppose, a case in point. I am of opinion, for one, that all of her miracles were well arranged and preconcerted tricks."

"Whatever may be the case with Madame Blavatsky, gentlemen," put in one of the strangers who had been introduced as a Mr. Wharncliffe, "I do not think that anyone who has visited India, and seen the performances of the native jugglers, can apply the same strictures to them. I have myself witnessed some most strange and unaccountable feats in that mysterious country."

The speaker was a tall, dark, fine-looking, bearded man, of perhaps forty or thereabouts, on whose skin tropical suns had evidently done their work, of a rather grave and serious aspect, and distinguished air. Beyond these features, which are not so rare as to be extraordinary among polished and travelled gentlemen of any country in the world, there was another, which at once withdrew him from the conventional type I have depicted. That was the eye. It was an eye with a bright, black, dazzling pupil, which would have served to render its owner singular in any company. It was an eye, too, that seemed to lack, when I first saw it, what I shall term soul, and depth, and calm. Not that it was forbidding, but, on the contrary, attractive, and the longer I looked at it, the more pleasant and attractive did it seem to become.

"My friend, Mr. Wharncliffe, here," explained Harding, who had introduced him, himself a member of a large mercantile house, "is recently from the East, and can give us, I doubt not, some interesting points on the occult from his own personal experience."

The stranger waved his hand deprecatingly, and assured us that his knowledge was confined merely to what he had seen. He was not prepared, he said, to philosophise upon causes.

"You have, all of you," he went on, "doubtless read of—perhaps some of you have seen—those feats, or tricks of legerdemain, performed commonly by Hindoo jugglers of the better sort; such as planting a seed in a flower-pot, wherefrom rises a plant before your eyes; producing bowls of water, when there was apparently

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no possible place of concealment for objects of such dimensions; and all this with no stage paraphernalia, such as our modern conjurors, who imitate these tricks, have ready to their hand, but simply upon the open ground, the spectators standing round. But, perhaps, the most marvellous of these tricks, or deceptions," he proceeded, "is that in which the juggler plants a wooden pole in the soil, up which he successively sends a cat, a monkey, and several other small animals, each of which disappears on reaching the top—vanishes, so to speak, into thin air. Not a vestige of them is afterwards seen."

"May it not be," suggested someone, "that this miraculous effect is produced by exerting some sort of influence, akin to mesmeric, upon the eyes of the spectators—that the juggler really sends no animals at all up his pole, but merely makes the spectators think he does?"

"Just like that power," remarked someone else, "with which some mediæval necromancers were supposed to have been gifted. Scott uses it, if I remember right, in his 'Lay of the Last Minstrel'—the glamour, I think it was called. The Lady of Branksome sends someone she does not wish to be recognised from the castle—or was it the hobgoblin, Gilpin?—but, anyhow, as he passes the warder at the gate, he casts the 'glamour' over him, and the warder avers that nothing passed the gate but a 'a wisp of hay.'"

"I think, gentlemen, I can give a little reminiscence which may, perhaps, serve to throw some light upon this matter," said a voice in somewhat diffident, hesitating tones, which were more noticeable as they broke the pause which had succeeded the argument of the last speaker.

I turned like the rest to see who had spoken, as the voice was unfamiliar. It was a middle-sized, grey-haired, and grey-whiskered old gentleman, with a benevolent aspect, who beamed modestly at us through his spectacles, and like Harding's friend, Wharncliffe, had been brought to the club that evening by one of the members, and introduced to us as Mr. Johnson, a retired merchant.

"I hardly know, gentlemen, whether I am justified," resumed Mr. Johnson, with an apologetic air, "in taking part in the discussion of a subject of which I know so little, and have myself no personal experience. What I purpose telling you, if you will allow me, are the experiences of another, and you must judge for yourselves what they are worth. I should not, in fact, have intruded them at all upon your notice, had they not seemed to me to be peculiarly opposite to the present discussion. If you care to hear them, I shall be proud to serve you, and I can confidently assure you that the recital will not take long."

We encouragingly gave assent to Mr. Johnson, who thereupon told the following story:

"The scene of my part of the experience, gentlemen, if it can be called a part at all, was laid in the recently demolished prison of Pentonville. I, for a considerable time, held contracts for supplying a certain line of commodities to the prison, and as my business naturally took me there upon many occasions, I naturally became acquainted with many of the officials connected with the institution.

"About five or six years ago, while there to transact some business, which I found would entail my waiting for an hour or two, owing to the absence of the person it was necessary for me to see, and while I was sauntering about to kill time, I fell into conversation with Inspector Coulter, the well-known detective officer, who proposed that we should make a tour of the prison, he volunteering to be my guide. While I flatter myself that I have no taste for spectacles of misery, yet, having nothing better to do, I gladly availed myself of the kind offer of my able mentor, and an able mentor he proved himself to be.

"We passed through gallery after gallery, till we arrived at a portion where the securities seemed to be extra strong. The structure of the cells, fortified as they were by all the skill that can be brought to bear upon steel and iron, seemed to offer an impassable barrier to the criminals confined within, however daring and ingenious they might be. The cells situated in that part of the building, my guide explained, were reserved for the most dangerous and desperate class of criminals.

A repulsive-looking old man.

"At length we paused before one of the most forbidding of the sepulchre-like cells, and the Inspector asked me to look through the little square orifice in the door, which seemed to serve at once for the passage of food, air, and light to the wretched prisoners inside. I did so, and crouching in a corner, I beheld a grey and repulsive-looking old man, his hair and beard long, unkempt, and straggling.

"He took not the least notice of our presence, though he must have been, I think, aware of it. I was unprepared, however, for the—as I thought—heartless conduct of my guide, the more so, as he had spoken kindly and sympathetically to many of the prisoners we had passed.

"Absolutely unaccustomed as I am to the use of slang language and averse as I am to being the

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medium of its delivery, even in recounting it, truth compels me to say that upon this occasion Inspector Coulter, after stepping up to the orifice before referred to, and, actually making mouths at the poor, cowering wretch within, said:

"'Come, brace up, old man. None of these fakes. You can't play it on me. Why can't you give us something better than that? Make yourself the Prince of Wales or Mr. Gladstone, for instance. Have some style about you.'

"I confess I was shocked at this heartless tirade against an old and defenceless prisoner, who, however, took not the least notice of us, and presently we passed on.

"'That,' said the detective, 'is the most dangerous, the most elusive, and most inexplicable criminal that it ever has been my good or bad luck to come across. I saw you were surprised at the way I treated him, but if you knew about him what I know, you wouldn't think so.'

"I became interested to know what could have given this apparently innocuous old man such distinction in the detective's eyes, and upon our return in the officers' quarters, as I had still some time to spare, I reverted to the subject and questioned my friend regarding him and what he had done to make him such an object of official aversion and to necessitate his subjection to such rigorous treatment.

"'What has he done?' returned the Inspector testily; 'the question should rather be, what has he not done? Heaven only knows what unknown villainies, with his peculiar powers, and his peculiar opportunities for mischief, that man, if he can be called a man, has perpetrated. His is the most extraordinary and incomprehensible case that has ever come under my notice,' he continued, shaking his head. 'Nobody can make head or tail of it. No one really believes *me*, when I tell them what has come under my notice. They imagine that *I* am labouring under a delusion, and had it not been for a piece of peculiarly good fortune, and I may add, some very hard and close work of my own—' (You see, gentlemen," remarked Mr. Johnson parenthetically, "the whole affair impressed me so much that, having naturally a good memory, and my friends being pleased to credit me with being something of a *raconteur*, I am enabled to give you the story pretty much as Inspector Coulter gave it me)— 'the fellow never would have been brought to justice at all.

"'Even when I had him "dead set," as we call it, he would have escaped, if I had not nailed him by a ruse. Would *you* believe it, if I told you,' here the Inspector sunk his voice almost to a whisper, and spoke slowly and impressively, at the same time looking me straight in the eyes, 'would *you* believe that the old man you saw in that felon's cell is no more old than I am—at least, such is my firm conviction—and I am only forty-five? Would *you* believe that that man possesses the miraculous faculty of changing his appearance at will, not by a clever manipulation of disguises like your ordinary cracksman, or even like some members of my own profession, but by some mysterious power which seems to be innate in him? Would *you* believe that that grey and decrepit old man, if he were once outside his cell, could and would walk coolly and easily out of gaol, under the noses of all the warders and officers of the prison; yes, even under my own nose, did I not possess an infallible mode of detecting him and compelling him to resume his natural form. Yes, sir, he could walk out of that prison in the semblance of the governor himself if he so desired—at least, that is my firm conviction, though, unfortunately, it is nobody else's. Well, I hope they will not find out its truth some day to their cost.'

"I did not know, gentlemen, what to make of these words. Here was one of the most astute members of the metropolitan detective force, a man whose reputation and whose deeds put him at the head of his profession, giving expression to a theory so utterly at variance with common sense, that I did not know what to think.

"'He would have to be a very skilful actor and possess something of a wardrobe to do such a thing,' I at last remarked.

"'That is what they all say,' returned the detective impatiently. 'That is the way they all account for this man's powers—if, in fact, they give him credit for any; for there are many members of the police, and many reputable citizens outside, who still consider him a victim of mistaken identity; and, as I said before, had it not been for the direct testimony I was able to produce, together with my own unimpeachable reputation, this incomprehensible villain would never have been convicted.'

"'But what did he do?' I asked; 'what was the charge against him? and of what crime is he now convicted?'

"'Grand larceny,' returned my friend, 'and, thanks to me, he has got the full extent of the law. His time will not be out for a good many years yet, and, by that time, I hope to be able to restrain him in confinement by some means or other, by convincing the public of his true nature. He will, at any rate, be kept under surveillance.'

"'But surely,' I said, 'what he is enduring now is very rigorous treatment for such a comparatively simple offence as grand larceny.'

"'My only object is to prevent his escape,' explained the Inspector. 'Apart from his being subjected to such confinement, his treatment in the matter of everything else is on a par with that of criminals of his own class. I have been the means of putting him where he is, and consider that I was perfectly justified in doing so.'

"I shuddered to think of the misery in store for any one who might be so unfortunate as to incur the displeasure of Inspector Coulter, and wondered whether after all, the prisoner I had seen might not owe his wretched condition to some delusion on the part of the great detective himself—the brightest minds, it is said, are sometimes subject to such.

"'But the best thing I can do is to give you a brief history of the case,' continued the Inspector, 'and then you can judge for yourself. Something over a year ago, I received a letter from old Mr. Chisholm, senior partner of the well-known banking house of Chisholm, Moffat and Co., requesting me to call upon him immediately, and, as it was after banking hours when I received the dispatch, I concluded to call at his house. I found the old gentleman in a very perturbed state of mind. He told me that his bank had been robbed that forenoon in a very mysterious manner. He had gone out, as was his custom, about eleven o'clock, and while he was absent, a person, got up to resemble himself, had used this disguise to secure a considerable sum of money.

"'It was Mr. Chisholm's custom to leave the bank at eleven o'clock, and to be gone for about half-an-hour. So methodical was he in this respect that the clerks were surprised when, scarcely two minutes after he had left, he returned, and walking to his private office, immediately summoned his confidential clerk by bell. He then told him to bring him a thousand pounds in

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A lady and gentleman came out.

gold, in two bags. The clerk returned with the money, which Mr. Chisholm then put in his coat-tail pockets, a bag in each pocket, and immediately left the bank. Though the proceeding was somewhat unusual, and though Mr. Chisholm had forgotten to leave a memorandum of the sum drawn, nothing more was thought of it. He again returned at his customary hour, and it was not until the day's balance had been made up that the cashier reminded him of the morning's incident.

"'To say that Mr. Chisholm and his clerks were surprised is to give no expression to the general state of feeling, Mr. Chisholm affirming that he had not returned to the bank, as was stated, and had drawn no money that day, while the clerks were as positive that he had; two of them averring they had seen him receive the money and put it in his pocket. It then dawned upon him that he had been so cleverly personated that his clerks had all been deceived, and this became more apparent, as his personator was said by his confidential clerk to have spoken in low and unusual tones, briefly ordering the money to be brought, and evidently had not dared to write a receipt for it, as his writing would, of course, have at once exposed the deception that was being practised.

"'Hence my peremptory summons and the banker's perturbation.

"'There certainly was not much to go upon towards working up a case, but I told him I would do what I could, and we walked together down the hall towards the front door.

"'Just as I was leaving Mr. Chisholm's house, the drawing-room door opened, and a lady and gentleman came out, the former in outdoor dress.

"'"My daughter, Inspector Coulter; Inspector Coulter, Mr. Morton—my prospective son-in-law," said the old man, as he introduced us.

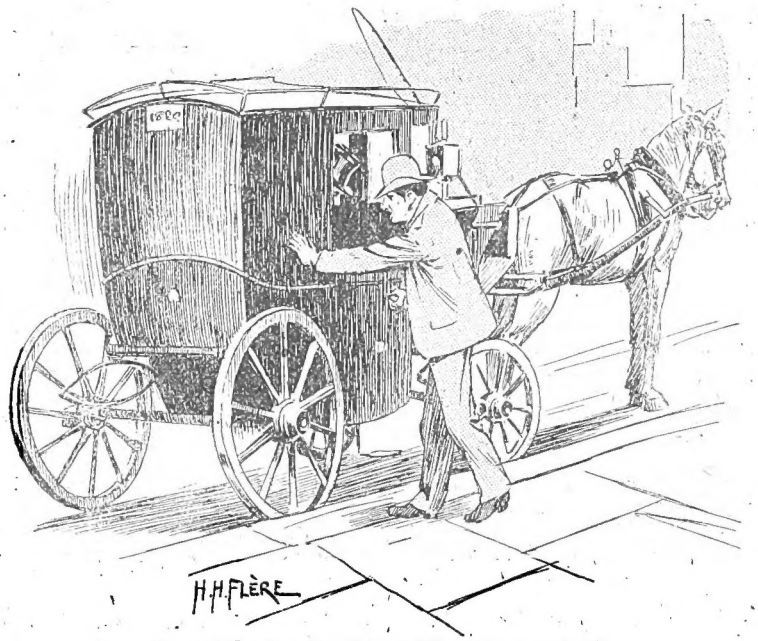
"'The gentleman—Mr. Morton—was a fine-looking fellow, of about five-and-thirty, or thereabouts, whom I know well by sight, and also by reputation, as one of our young millionaires. I rather envied his position beside the banker's daughter, as, besides being a bi- or tri-millionairess (if I may be allowed the expression) as the banker's heiress, she was a very pretty girl of five-and-twenty or so.

"'Well, I said "Good-bye," and walked down the street, considering the chances of discovering the thief. It was certainly a very pretty piece of work, and I came to the conclusion that the fellow who had done it was an expert in that particular line. One thousand was not a particularly big haul, I reasoned, but it was about as much as could be conveniently carried away in the method pursued, without exciting suspicion; and I came to the conclusion that the thief would not be long content with this small sum—that class of gentry is extravagant—and that it would not be long before he again exercised his talents in the same way upon some other bank.

"'I dismissed all idea of his appearing again at Chisholm, Moffat and Co.'s, that being the last place he would now be likely to visit.

"'When I considered the matter further, however, I saw how slim my chances were of catching my thief by watching the various banks. Even had I possessed an accurate description of him, there were just as many chances as there are banks in London to one against my being at the identical bank he meant to operate on at the time he entered it, supposing that I remained there during the business hours of a whole day. But when I considered that, in addition to this, I had no description to go upon, and that he could have no object in personating Mr. Chisholm again, I saw how useless it would be to watch aimlessly for him, besides entailing a heavy loss of valuable time. Still, I determined to chance a day or two on it, if only for Mr. Chisholm's satisfaction. He would personate, I argued, the manager of a bank, as in Mr. Chisholm's case; probably, too, an old man, as he had already been successful in that *rôle*.

"'So I looked about for a bank with a manager of that description, and having selected one which seemed to possess the requisites, I awaited developments. For three days I watched the manager go in and out; watched narrowly to see whether his exit would be followed by the entrance of anyone else of similar appearance. Then I reasoned with myself how foolish I was, and on the third day I started about noon to Mr. Chisholm's house, as I heard he was somewhat indisposed, to tell him that our sole dependence must now be placed on the work of my deputies, two of whom I



Banged the door to with a "Where to now, sir?"

had put immediately on the case, with the faint clue of tracing the thief by a certain stamp on the bags in which the coin was put up.

"'As I neared the house, at a distance of, perhaps, fifty yards, I saw Mr. Morton, the young lady's lover, emerge from the doorway, and descend the steps. He came toward me, and nodded as we passed each other.

"'I walked on in the direction of the house, which was a corner one, and as I neared it, saw a figure crossing the street, and evidently also making for the house. I mounted the steps and rang the bell, and just as the servant opened the door, I heard steps behind me. On turning, what was my astonishment to see Mr. Morton, whom I had passed upon the street about a minute before. Now I distinctly recollected looking down the street in the direction I had come, just before mounting the steps, and there was one within the distance of the street. I was morally certain that the gentleman beside me was the one I had seen crossing the street. This train of thought occupied but a second.

"'"You have made a quick return, Mr. Morton," I remarked, as he brushed past me, muttering something I did not catch.

"'Mr. Chisholm, the footman said, was not in, but would I wait? He was liable to return at any moment. I said that I would, and was shown into a little study, where I had had the interview with him before.

"'I am a man of quick perception—my profession has had something to do with making them so. I could not account for the reappearance of Mr. Morton. Could it be a brother? That must be it. And certainly a twin brother, by the remarkable resemblance. I was roused from my little reverie by the sound of voices in rather an excited key. They came from the partition door which separated the study from the adjoining room.

"'"I tell you, Clara, it will be best for all parties," said a male voice with a decided inflection.

"'"But, oh, Harry, it will break papa's heart," pleaded a female one.

"'The voices grew indistinct. I made up my mind that they were those of the gentleman who had just entered, and Mr. Chisholm's daughter. He was evidently trying to persuade her to do something to which she was averse. And she called him Harry—Henry, I knew, was Mr. Morton's name. Then it *was* Mr. Morton I had met upon the street. But how—here the voices became distinct again.

"'"But why this sudden change of mind, Harry? When you left here, scarcely ten minutes ago, you were so loving and so contented that we should wait till the day that had been fixed upon—and it is little more than a week, dearest!" cooed a dove-like voice that a man must have been a brute to resist.

"'"Yes; but Clara," returned the male voice in tones far more harsh and imperative than endearing, "it must be as I say. There are grave reasons for it, which I will explain later on. I will guarantee to satisfy your father later on of the necessity of the step. But not a word now. And, Clara, remember if we do not take this step now, it may be years before I can call you my own—it may be never."

"'A passionate burst of tears was all the answer to this.

"'Ha! thought I, it is an elopement they are planning. But what could be Morton's object? Was he in difficulties? And if he was, how could eloping with his lady-love help him? And what difference could a week make—for had not Miss Chisholm said that the day had been fixed for a week hence? There was some mystery which demanded explanation. There was something crooked evidently, which I then and there determined to straighten out.

"'Again the male voice became audible.

"'It is now one o'clock, Clara. I shall go down to the bank and draw some money. I will return at two sharp. Have everything ready by that time. We must catch the afternoon express for Dover. Good-bye, dearest,' and the dialogue ended with what I thought a rather perfunctory kiss.

"'My mind was at once made up. Hastily scrawling a line to the banker, and leaving it on the table, I emerged from the door just as Mr. Morton was crossing the street. At the corner he paused and raised his arm. He was evidently signalling for something. Half-way down the street stood a cab with nobody on the box. I instantly grasped the situation. It was neck or nothing with me now, as there was not another vehicle in sight, and I was determined to see the play out. So, when Morton started to walk for that cab, I followed him swiftly, and, just as he reached it, ran the last few steps and came up puffing and blowing, opened the door, with a "Sorry to detain you, sir, but a friend——" banged it to with a "Where to now, sir?" jumped on the box, and was whirling off to the City, before the poor driver, who had doubtless stepped in somewhere for a moment for a glass of beer, reappeared to realise his loss. We detectives are sometimes as free in the conversion of property as your veriest thief himself, when occasion calls for it, but then it is only temporary, you know; the owner finds the property at Scotland

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Yard in the morning, and gets well repaid for any loss he may have sustained by its appropriation.

"'Mr. Morton gave me the simple direction, "Fenton Street," and when I reined up at the corner, got out and told me to wait until he returned, which he said would be in a few minutes. I pretended to acquiesce, but immediately gave the cab in charge to a lounger, and followed him closely, though unseen. He sauntered leisurely along the street, finally taking a good position where he could command a good view of the entrance to the Carsell Bank. Presently he looked at his watch, and seemed to be growing impatient. After a minute or two I saw his eye light up, and looking across the street, I saw the manager of the bank—I knew him perfectly by sight—leaving it in close conversation with another gentleman.

"'I will not say what my thoughts were when I saw Mr. Morton, after a lapse of a minute or two, cross the street and enter the bank. I was unavoidably crowded back by the throng, but certainly did not enter the building more than five seconds behind him. I looked round but he was not there. Had he escaped me? or—a strange suspicion floated across my mind. What if I had chanced after all upon the solution of the very mystery which I had given up in despair that very morning?

"'I kept my eyes fixed upon the door leading to the manager's office, took up a position behind an angle of the counter where I would not be seen from that direction, and waited. In about five minutes the door opened and there issued from it a figure that I could have sworn was the manager of the bank whom I had seen pass down the street a few minutes before. The same style of clothes, the same hat, the same trim, close-cropped white beard and whiskers—all were there. I had evidently found my man. But the idea of finding this expert criminal in the millionaire, Mr. Morton! Should I arrest him on the moment? I could easily have done so, but admiration for his admirable get-up deterred me.

"'We detectives you know entertain a sincere admiration for criminals who know their business. We look upon crime as a profession; it can be raised even to the dignity of an art. We are the critics of that art, and as critics cannot help admiring a thorough artist. I accordingly did not act on my first impulse; but, knowing now that I had my man whenever I wanted him, I felt supremely easy for the outcome. A great load had been taken from my mind, and the cheerful smile with which I bustled up to the cab a few moments after my fare got there, was not forced but real. So was the deferential bow with which I greeted the fact that between the bank and the cab he had, while walking, as thoroughly rechanged himself from the manager of the Carsell Bank to Mr. Morton as he had originally done from Mr. Morton to the manager of the Bank. For, it must be remembered, I had not even then dreamed of the true nature of the transformation. There were sufficient points of dress resemblance between personator and personated upon the present occasion as to make, to my mind at that time, the personation possible.

"'After my fare had got in I very gingerly steered my way through the thronged street, with the express purpose of gaining time to come across one of my co-workers, to whom I could give instructions on the case, there being none of them in sight when I started. Luckily, before I had gone far, I espied one of my deputies to whom I signalled, and who, in ten seconds of whispered conversation, knew all that was required. Well, I made such good time on the drive back that Mr.

His daughter shrieked and fainted.

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Morton was able to come within a very few minutes of keeping his appointment with Miss Chisholm at two o'clock. As I opened the door of the cab for him I stood so that he could not pass me without brushing against me, and I then became aware that at least one of his pockets was well loaded with something solid and heavy. I gave him a short start, but reached the door and entered the house but little behind him. Mr. Chisholm was now at home, and to him I briefly explained as much as was necessary of the day's experiences. He heard me in amazement.

"'"Mr. Morton a bank robber!" he exclaimed. "Why, the thing is preposterous. He does not need it. Besides, he banks with that very house."

"'"But the man closeted with your daughter at this moment," I replied, for his overcoat was hanging in the hall, and I knew very well where he was, "is not Mr. Morton at all."

"'At this moment the door of the drawing-room opened—Mr. Chisholm and I were standing in the hall—and Mr. Morton and Miss Chisholm came out, the latter, as before, in walking dress. Mr. Morton took his hat and overcoat from the rack and proceeded to put them on.

"'"Pardon me, Mr. Morton——" I began.

"'"Why, I paid you!" he said, recognising me as the cab-driver.

"'"Yes, but I am now in a different character," I said. "Don't you remember being introduced to me the other day as Inspector Coulter of the detective police?"

"'His countenance fell, but he said:

"'"Well, sir, what of that?"

"'"Simply that I must detain you," I said, "on suspicion. There have been two bank robberies committed lately, one at the Corsell Bank to-day, and the suspicion of having committed them rests on you. No doubt you can clear yourself of it completely, but I must nevertheless detain you."

"'"Why, what is the meaning of all this, Mr. Chisholm?" exclaimed Morton, while Clara clung to his side. "Will you allow me to be insulted in your house, and in the presence of your daughter? I have just come from the Corsell Bank, where I drew a considerable sum in gold. Here it is in my overcoat," slapping his pocket, "and for this I am to be accused of robbery!"

"'Of course, I had no proof of any crime having been committed, and was acting simply upon instinct; but just then the door bell rung, and, to my satisfaction, two officers entered, according to instructions, one of whom brought the news that the Corsell Bank had actually paid a thousand pounds a short while before to someone personating the manager, and the other, a warrant for the arrest of John Doe as the perpetrator of the crime.

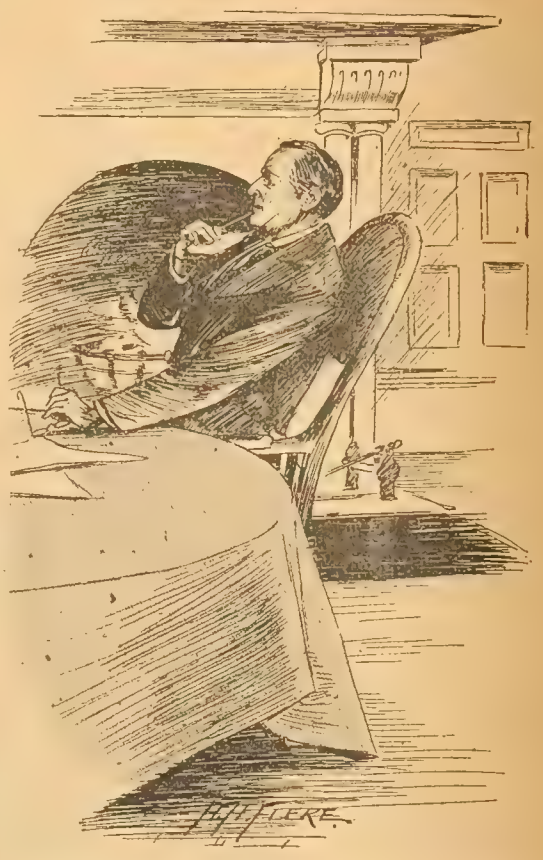
"'Mr. Chisholm was thunderstruck. His daughter shrieked and fainted. But I was accustomed to such scenes, and left them to the care of the household, while I handcuffed Mr. Morton and bundled him into a cab, which took us swiftly to Scotland Yard. I may state parenthetically that two hours afterwards, as I heard, Clara was in the arms of the real Mr. Morton, but does not to this day believe that he was not unjustly arrested and afterwards released. She always regards me with aversion when we meet.

"'Well, to make a long story short, though the bank officials swore that the accused in court was not the man they paid the money to, they identified the sacks, and my direct testimony, and the fact that the money was found upon his person, of course, convicted him. Since his confinement he has thought fit to assume and preserve the shape in which we saw him in his cell to-day. And now,' concluded Inspector Coulter, 'I ask you whether I am justified or not in treating, as I do, a man who, should he escape, possesses such untold capabilities for mischief?'"

* * * * *

"Well, gentlemen," went on Mr. Johnson, addressing us, "it was scarcely a month after that when I met my friend, the detective, in Regent Street. He had a troubled look on his face, and, as he shook my hand, said:

"'Well, he has escaped.'



Taking off, first his spectacles, then his trim, white beard.

"'What! Morton?' said I.

"'Yes the fellow we called Morton. He never gave us any name. He cut through his cell door, strong as it was, and the rest was easy. Yes, he's at large. But I'll get him again.'

"'How?' I asked curiously.

"'I have one infallible sign to go by,' replied the detective impressively, '*his eye*. Under all his transformations he could never change *that*. I'll come across him yet.'"

During Mr. Johnson's recital of his experience in Pentonville Prison our little party, which was lounging about on chairs in no fixed order, had been very attentive listeners; so attentive, in fact, that it had hardly noticed the advent of a messenger toward the conclusion, who

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delivered a large-sized envelope to the third stranger of the party. That gentleman, I noticed, simply took the envelope without a word, so engrossed was he, apparently, with the story, and put it in his pocket.

Just as Mr. Johnson concluded, however, and while there was the usual buzz and hum of approval which follows any story of any length, bad or good, two gentlemen got up simultaneously from their seats, stretched themselves and sauntered towards the door, which was open, and led to the main apartments of the club. I did not, and I do not think anyone else did, even notice who they were. One of the gentlemen got to the door, it seemed to me, a little before the other, closed it, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

This remarkable action had an electric effect upon the company. Everyone sat rooted to the spot and looked at the door. Surprise was still further depicted upon their countenances when they looked round and observed that two of the strangers who had been introduced that evening were not now in the room, and that the gentleman who had just locked the door and put the key in his pocket was a well-known detective, and that the other was a well-known club-man whom I shall call Mr. Wharton. It was further observed that Mr. Wharncliffe, the gentleman from India, who had been introduced by Mr. Harding, had disappeared. It was unaccountable. Nobody had left the room, nobody had entered it but the messenger. Mr. Johnson broke the suspense by coolly taking off, first his spectacles, then his trim, white beard and whiskers, and saying:

"Gentlemen, the story which I have just been telling you is so true that you will presently have practical proof of it. I am not sure, however, that I would have made it so long, or, in fact, have told it at all, if I had not wished to gain time, so that my friend, Mr. Hogan, might receive the warrant for the arrest of the gentleman who stands near him at the door. Gentlemen, the facts are these: I am Inspector Coulter, of the detective police force; that gentleman beside Mr. Hogan is the man Morton, who escaped from Pentonville; I have traced him to this city, where he has been about a week; to-day one of your prominent banks was robbed of ten thousand pounds. I recognised Morton in Mr. Wharncliffe *by his eye.*

"The money was paid late in the afternoon, and taken away in a cab, Morton, as usual, successfully personating the manager of the bank. Now he is, I suppose, personating someone else."

We had clustered excitedly to the door before Inspector Coulter had finished speaking. There, beside the detective stood the well-known Mr. Wharton, to whom, as I afterwards learnt, Wharncliffe had been introduced that day, protesting vigorously against his detention, and demanding to be told what all the trouble was about. We should all of us have taken oath that it was he, but Inspector Coulter held otherwise.

"Look at his *eye!*" he said as he slipped handcuffs on his wrists.

And in truth, though Warton's eye is clear and black, I never saw it with such an evil, dazzling glitter as I saw then. The process was perfectly legal, even if it had been Wharton, and so the club was treated to the spectacle of that popular and respected member being ignominiously conducted through its apartments and down its stairs, handcuffed and unceremoniously bundled into a cab. When the real Wharton came in an hour afterwards, he was the butt of the most annoying questions regarding his prison experience, and is a most mystified man yet.

As for Morton, he is now in prison, though no charge has been entered against him on the books, and but few know of the presence of so mysterious a character there. The reason that his name is not on the books is that no one knows where he has concealed the ten thousand pounds he obtained from the bank. There is a chance that he may be allowed to go free if he restores this money, and if so Inspector Coulter had better look sharp after him. As for the scientific diagnosis of the case, Doctor Martineaut and others—he is secreted, by the way, in the receiving hospital—are puzzling over it unceasingly.

They have discovered that so long as he is awake he has power to appear in almost any human shape he desires to all those in reach of his wonderful eye; but that when he is asleep, or under the influence of chloroform, he always looks the same, and that is the sinister, crafty character he is. One can hardly escape the conclusion that this mysterious gift of personation lies wholly and solely in some mysterious magnetic or mesmeric power, which affects the perceptive faculties of all brains that come within reach of his influence, and moulds their perceptions so that they can only appreciate such forms as are imagined in his own brain and projected upon theirs through the rays that dart from his dominant eye and are received by their subjective ones. This, however, must be left to our future psychological science to elucidate.

ROBERT DUNCAN MILNE.

How can the Sixth Number of *Pearson's Magazine*, published on the 1st of June fail to be of the greatest interest, when it includes among its literary and artistic contributors such names as those of Stanley L. Wood, C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne, George Griffith, Harry Furniss, Hal Hurst, R.B.A., Sydney Cowell, Robert Barr, Charles May, Sir Walter Besant, etc., etc.?

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ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. Charles Raymond's young wife was the happiest woman in the world until one fine day when she stood at the window watching him come up the avenue.

"Dear, noble fellow, how handsome he is," she said in a wifely rapture, as she watched him hurrying home. His beauty was purely of an imaginative type—he was near-sighted and his legs bowed a little, but to one woman he was a hero without a flaw, and that one woman was his wife.

"Dear boy, he must be starving," she further soliloquised. "He hardly ate a mouthful for breakfast. Why, what is that he is tearing up—must be a bill that he doesn't want me to see."

Mr. Charles Raymond had suddenly taken a folded paper from his pocket, glanced hurriedly at it, and then torn it into infinitely small bits, which he threw to the winds, which in their turn deposited them in a vacant piece of ground. There was a falling barometer in the Raymond family that day at noon. The social sun went under a cloud and stayed there. A gloom permeated the household atmosphere. It was not evolved by Mr. Raymond for he had come home in almost jubilant spirits. These went down correspondingly with the low pressure in the domestic area, and remained stationary at freezing point. His wife's spirits registered below zero.

A cold meal, a hurried embrace that was not returned, and the young man went back to his business, wondering what had caused the home weather to change so suddenly. When he was out of sight Mrs. Raymond put on her cloak and went out. She walked rapidly until she came to a vacant piece of ground that was in sight of the house. Here she stopped, looked up and down the street, scanned the windows of the houses in the neighbourhood, and said aloud:

"I'll do it. There's no harm in it, I am sure. It is my duty to know, as a wife, if Charlie has any bills to be troublesome. He has been economising lately, now I come to think of it. I can help him if he is in trouble, and I will."

Then she began searching over the ground like the veriest rag-picker, until she had collected a dozen or more small scraps of paper, not one of which was larger than the size of a single word. With the quick intuition of a woman, which is more like instinct than judgment, she saw that these scraps were not the remains of a bill, but of a sheet of note paper that had been closely written over in a bold masculine hand.

* * * * *

Locking herself in her room, Mrs. Raymond, seated at her desk with a sheet of blank paper and a bottle of gum before her, proceeded to restore the paper scraps to their relative positions. She worked long and patiently, developing at the same time every emotion in the human calendar. Anger, jealousy, indignation, scorn, and a consuming curiosity by turns possessed her. At times her face expressed incredulity, which was instantly followed by a dreadful certainty. She cried a little, but she was almost too angry for tears. Oh, to have been so deceived by one she had loved with her whole heart since she first knew him! And the honeymoon was scarcely over! Then she re-read the miserable letter. It was written by Charlie's chum, a man she had not yet seen, and who professed to be a woman-hater.

This was the letter:

"Dear Charlie,—I saw your divinity to-day. (Here Mrs. R. wept.) She is a beauty, and you're a lucky dog. ('Oh, the wretch!') She looked awfully swell in her pretty togs, and does your good taste credit. There's a lot of us fellows want to know the new beauty. ('I'll scratch her eyes out, the good-for-nothing!') Do you intend to let your old friends meet her, or do you want to keep her all to yourself? But we'll be on our good behaviour, Charlie, honour bright. She's a darling, and we want you to trot her out, and give us a regular introduction, and we'll get up a little supper after the theatre."

"An actress? Yes, Charlie does admire actresses, and his new 'divinity' is an actress! Oh, Charlie, Charlie, you have broken your wife's heart."

After a flood of tears Mrs. Raymond read a few closing lines, which were of no consequence, and the name signed to it "Reginald Newcombe." Then she took counsel with herself, with the result that she came to a sudden conclusion.

"I'll do it! 'I'll beard the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall.'"

And Mrs. Raymond dressed herself in her prettiest costume and went out.

* * * * *

Reginald Newcombe, lawyer and commissioner, was in his office, the air of which was thick with tobacco smoke, when his confidential clerk—a seedy student in a shabby suit—plunged in from the outer room.

"Lady," he gasped, "dressed to kill! After divorce most likely. Where shall I——"

But this speech was cut short by the entrance of a beautiful young woman dressed in the height of fashion. The lawyer unlimbered himself from the table and stood up to gaze at the apparition.

"Could I speak to you a moment in private, sir?" she asked, smiling sweetly.

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"Yes, madam, come into my private office," he replied as pleasantly as was consistent with his gruff nature, while he said to himself: "Charlie Raymond's wife? H'm! Wonder if she is going to engage me as her lawyer. Be seated, please," and he dropped into a chair himself and began to brace up for the occasion. But Mrs. Raymond did not sit down. She remained standing, and had changed from smiles to tears, which coursed down her lovely cheeks in rivulets.

"Read that, sir, it is signed with your name," she said desperately.

"I don't know what you mean, my dear madam," said the lawyer impatiently. "Is this patchwork document——"

"Read, read. Every word is there. It is a communication from you to my husband, and your name confirms the infamy."

"Infamy? Oh, I see! May I ask," stiffening to meet the charge that he saw was coming, "if Charlie—Mr. Raymond—gave you this letter to read?"

"Oh, no, sir. He did not betray the confidence of his noble friend, certainly not. I—I—no matter how I became possessed of the letter—there should be no secrets between husband and wife."

"What do you wish me to do? Deny or confirm the authenticity of these scraps of paper?"

"This! Tell me the name of his divinity—the woman who has taken my h—h—husband's love from me. Let me see her that I may——"

"Murder her?" inquired the lawyer.

"No, that I may plead on my bended knees to give him back to me."

"Madam, you have conquered. I will call at your house to night and, in the presence of your husband, give you the information you have asked."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Newcombe, you have a kind heart, after all. Forgive me for this intrusion, but you do not know the depth of a wife's love."

"No. Thank goodness, I don't," mumbled the bachelor under his breath. Then aloud he said:

"Do not speak of this to your husband until I come this evening. Good-bye, Mrs. Raymond," and he showed her to the door.

When she was gone, he went back to his den, sat down in his chair and laughed until his face was purple.

"Jealous!" he roared. "The best joke of the season! Jealous of—oh, ha! ha!"

* * * * *

Charles Raymond had not passed one unhappy hour during the blissful three months of honeymoon which had promised to extend themselves into years. The shy bird of happiness had descended on his roof-tree and seemed to make a refuge there. And now in one brief moment she had opened her wings and soared away. What had frightened her? He did not know, and his heart was heavy within him. If this was a woman's caprice, then he was learning another phase of his wife's character and one that sorely disappointed him. The chill which had struck to his heart at noon that day continued with him. It was there when he went home at night. He tried to throw it off and act as if nothing had happened. But his wife repulsed his attempt to kiss her.

"What is the matter, Netta?" he asked anxiously, for he loved her very dearly.

"You ask me that—you—Charles Raymond. Oh, the wicked duplicity of men!" she said, with a withering scorn.

"Netta," said Charlie coolly, "I don't know why you are angry, but my conscience is clear. I have done nothing to deserve this treatment. Will you have a chop?" The servant had brought in the dinner.

"Chop?" repeated Netta in a heartbroken voice. "I suppose a man would eat if the whole house were tumbling about his ears."

"We will postpone any further discussion," suggested Charles quietly, as he did not wish to have domestic afflictions rehearsed in the kitchen.

So they ate in silence, and then went, by a common consent that had become mechanical, to the library, where they usually had music and a chat, when not interrupted by callers.

It appeared they were not to be alone. The bell rang loudly, and a voice was heard inquiring for Mr. and Mrs. Raymond. Charlie jumped to his feet, frowning angrily.

"Reggy Newcombe—what brings him here? Netta, I do not wish you to meet him—I——"

* * * * *

"Too late, old fellow," said a resolute voice. "I have called to pay my respects to Mrs. Raymond, and to apologise to you, Charlie, for a letter I wrote yesterday concerning your excellent wife, and——"

"My wife did not see the letter or know that it was written," said Charlie stiffly. "I had too much respect for her to tell her that you dare allude to her slangily as you would speak of a horse or dog. I tore that letter up into scraps, and intended to have it out with you as soon as we met."

"You did, eh? Now, my dear Mrs. Raymond, will you kindly listen to me a moment, as I consider an apology is due in this matter, and I want you to intercede for me. Charlie doesn't know what a staid individual I am, but seems to think I am one of the boys. I assure you that the head and front of my offending is the letter in question, which he was so discreet as to tear up. I had seen his wife and had dared, not meaning any disrespect, to write to him and speak of her beauty—pardon me—and refer to her in what I can see myself was quite too demonstrative a style. But I am an old bachelor, an orphan—a disgruntled, disappointed man, and unbearable. If you will forgive me, my dear madam, I promise to reform."

"Then the letter was about me," began Netta, stammering.

"Yes, madam," said the lawyer, frowning awfully at poor Netta, "I was most unprofessionally diffuse, and—pardon me—raved over your beauty and style in a manner that might have tempted your husband to call me out if I had not been such an old friend of his."

"Oh, it's all right, dear," said Charlie. "I didn't let you see the letter, but tore it up as I came home."

"I saw you," said Netta coolly, but with a radiant face, "and I wondered what you were tearing up so viciously."

"You saw me?" echoed Charlie; "thereby hangs a tale, I imagine. Did you think I had a secret from you, dearest?"

Netta glanced cautiously at the face of the lawyer. It reassured her, and she answered without hesitation.

"You couldn't have a secret from me, Charlie. I shall always trust you. And now perhaps your friend would like a little music," and as her fingers ran over the keys on the piano Netta thought serenely:

"I wonder how I could have been so absurd as to make myself wretched about—that other woman."

ESTHER NOANES.

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AN INDIAN DRUG

BY HUAN MEE,

Author of "The Czar's Diamond," "In Masquerade," "Alan Lindow's Wife," "Philip St. Voullé's Understudy," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.
A DEADLY POISON.

ESTLIN GODFRY carefully selected an oblong case from the secret drawer of his writing cabinet, and extracting from it several small bottles, covered with curious Eastern inscriptions in red, yellow, and black characters, similar to those that adorn strips of genuine Indian ink, gazed at them with the eye of a connoisseur.

Gazed at them with the eye of a connoisseur.

Estlin Godfry had only been back in England three weeks, and had devoted that time to the unpacking and arranging of a multitude of curios that he had gathered in India. These he had distributed about his sanctum or had given to intimate friends, and had enlarged and expatiated upon them with the loving eloquence of a traveller, but the tiny little packet he was now examining had not yet been shown to anyone, for the reason that none of his acquaintances in the thriving and populous little town of Maythorn were sufficiently interested in the matter of curious drugs and unique poisons to appreciate a concoction so deadly that instant death was the portion of anyone who should taste a single drop of it.

Why did he purchase it from the Indian Fakir? He did not know, he had no desire or necessity for possessing such a power of life and death, and yet there was a strange unaccountable fascination in having in that tiny glass phial a drug unknown in England; a poison that had no antidote, that brought death sudden, swift, and painless, and left no trace behind, no trace beyond utter paralysis of brain, heart and nerve system. It would be an interesting experiment to test the power asserted to be possessed by this colourless drug that glistened limpid and innocent in the phial.

He had seen animals killed in India by the primitive puff and dart, they had dropped dead almost without convulsion when they were hit, and this, he was told, was the kind of poison that had killed them.

He slipped the bottles in his pocket, and taking his hat and stick left Merton House, the residence of his uncle, Joseph Monro, and went to the town to the shop of his old friend, Walter Shenfield, chemist, a man who was really wasted upon a country town, no matter how large its population, whose constant researches in the fascinating fields of chemistry were carried out merely for his own pleasure, and whose discoveries, small though they were, might with more prominent surroundings have been turned to the benefit of mankind.

As Estlin Godfry traverses the half-mile from Merton House to the town, let us look a little at his career. Adopted by his uncle, Joseph Monro, at the age of five, his early tuition and college education were well looked after, and there had only been one cause of disagreement between the nephew and the

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man who all the gossips rumoured intended to leave him a fortune, and the cause of that disagreement was—a woman. During a stay that Estlin Godfry made in London some two years previously, just at the age of twenty-one, he became enamoured of a lady whose connection with the variety stage was not a recommendation in the eyes of staid Joseph Monro, who at once gave Estlin the alternative of relinquishing all thoughts of an alliance with the lady or of forfeiting the position that he held in his uncle's house, and in order to render the severance from the lady the easier, Monro, in his usual generous way, offered to send Estlin on a trip to India, which had been the long cherished wish of the young man's heart.

After all, the love that Estlin fancied he held for the lady was no more than a transient fascination, and against this was thrown into the scale the fulfilment of a lifelong desire to travel in the East. With genuine thanks he had accepted the offer, and the change of scene and the new life of the Eastern world had removed the infatuation from his mind, a process of obliteration which had been very much assisted by the announcement, in a marked newspaper that reached him, of the marriage of the lady to the good-for-nothing son of a sporting peer.

The shop of Walter Shenfield, chemist by examination, was deserted upon that autumn evening; the demand for pennyworths of violet powder, tooth-brushes or cakes of scented soap had ceased. The enormous red Cyclopean eye that glared as though a warning danger signal of the poisonous drugs in those black bottles with large hooded caps on the top shelves, threw a stream of ruddy light across the narrow pavement.

Walter Shenfield, in the glass screened-off corner of the counter where he compounded prescriptions, was hard at work upon one of his endless experiments, the flame under the fragile test tube was boiling the purple fluid into a sea of bubbles and a golden foam was forming on the top. The eyes of the chemist glistened as the success of this experiment seemed assured, when with a sharp snap the tube cracked, and for the fifth time wrested success from the hand of the experimenter at the very acme of its fulfilment.

With an impatient exclamation he blew out the spirit-lamp, and, glancing at the clock, recognised with satisfaction that it lacked but a quarter of an hour to his usual closing time.

He closed his books, cast aside the damaged tube, replaced various bottles of crystals and acids in their accustomed niches on the shelves, and as he finished, the figure of Estlin Godfry crossed the flood of light, which bathed him for a moment as in a stream of blood, and entered.

"Good-evening, Shenfield."

"Ah, good-evening, Estlin."

"Trade seems dull."

"Beastly dull in this hole; there's no chance for a man of science. He never gets beyond a shilling bottle of physic. If it were not for my experiments, I should go melancholy mad."

"Ah, my boy, you ought to go to India. Bombay, or Calcutta would suit you—and you could get jolly good prices for your stuff. Why a man told me he——"

"No good, my boy, I'm a native plant, not an exotic."

"Well, how are the experiments going?"

"Only pretty well; five times I have tried one combination, and five times just at the very point of success the tube has cracked."

"What is the latest?"

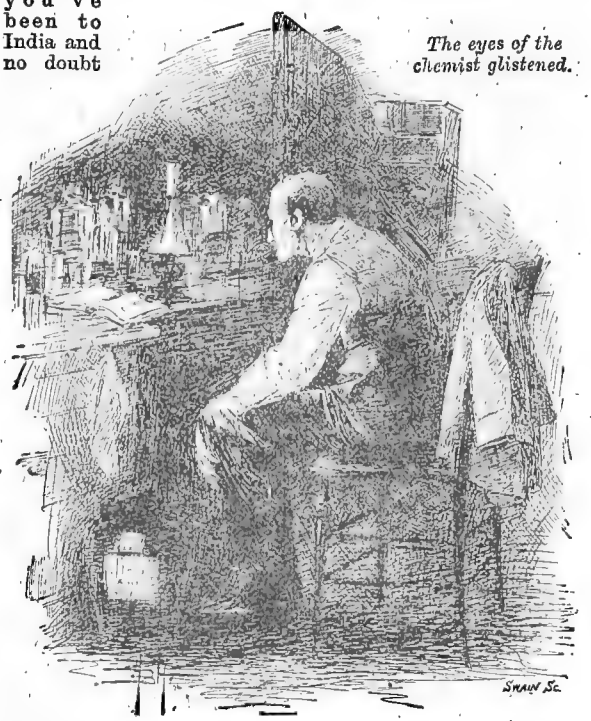
"Oh, another antidote."

"It seems to me a most extraordinary thing, Shenfield, that so much time and trouble, so much research and labour should be devoted to the discovery of antidotes. The obvious moral is, don't take the poison and you won't need the antidote, and if a man wants to commit suicide, why not let him?"

"But accidents."

"Oh, they're rare, and even then nine times out of ten a fellow would be dead before you could give him the needful remedy."

"Well sometimes, but it's an interesting study. Now, you've been to India and no doubt



The eyes of the chemist glistened.

have seen deaths from snake bites; surely you applaud the research that found remedies like strychnine—one poison counteracting another?"

"That's all very well, but a man can't carry a chemist's shop about with him on every sporting expedition, and then there are poisons so fatal that there is no time to administer any antidote—the man takes them—accident or design, or it may be a wound from a poisoned weapon and it's all over."

"Myths, my dear boy. Myths, nearly all of them, there's sure to be an antidote—only you've got to find it."

"Well now, look here, Shenfield," and Estlin produced three curiously inscribed bottles from his pocket, "here's some stuff I got in India—why the deuce I bought it I don't know, unless it was to give it to you. The copper-faced heathen who sold it assured me that as little as could be conveyed on the point of a pin was instant and painless death." Estlin handed over the bottles to Shenfield who cautiously removed the skin covering the cork of one and opened it.

"Do you really believe it?" he asked at length after a careful scrutiny of the fluid as if he almost expected it to announce its deadly nature.

"Well, I don't know. Try it!"

"What!"

"Not on yourself. Try it on a mouse or a rabbit. You're pretty fond of experimenting upon those little animals. Really, Shenfield, I believe you're callous enough in the pursuit of science to go in for vivisection."

For answer Shenfield opened the door leading to the room behind the shop and returned with a diminutive rabbit, which he gave to Estlin to hold.

"Half a minute," remarked the latter, "you'd better shut the shop up first."

While Estlin nursed the victim destined for sacrifice, Shenfield and the boy he employed to take home the occasional mixtures compounded from hereditary prescriptions,

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shut up the establishment, and closed the ruby eye that glared in solitary loneliness across the deserted footpath. The boy, dismissed for the night, went off with a whoop, and the experimenters turned their attention to the rabbit. Estlin held the animal, and Shenfield dipped a thin glass rod into the opened bottle and touched the tip of its tongue with it. Almost instantaneously the animal became rigid and its heart seemed to cease its beating. Estlin, with a perceptible gesture of repugnance, laid the little body down upon the counter.

"That's quick enough," he remarked.

"Yes; a deadly poison."

Suddenly, with a convulsive twitch, the rabbit rolled over on its back, tipping over the open bottle as it did so, and spilling the rest of the liquid. It was stone dead.

"He's upset it now," remarked Estlin.

"And a good riddance, too," rejoined Shenfield. "It beats prussic, silly; you had better let me put the other two bottles out of harm's way," and without waiting for consent he took them from the counter and locked them in a small cupboard. Then wiping the counter down with a sheet of tissue paper, he threw it and the empty bottle behind the blazing fire of the inner room.

The dead rabbit was buried in the garden, and the incident soon forgotten, as Estlin recounted some stirring episodes of his Eastern trip, to which the chemist listened with attentive ears.

CHAPTER II.

Found Dead.

It is the day of the wedding, the day upon which Miss Ethel Sedwicke is for ever to throw aside the name she has held for some twenty-five years, and become Mrs. Monro, and the heir expectant until to-day, Estlin Godfry, is surprising even his greatest admirers with his geniality, and evident satisfaction at the whole proceedings.

Estlin gazes anxiously at the unconscious figure.

He is "a good fellow," so everyone owns, and seems to have no more thought of the fortune that is passing away from him than he has for cigarettes which he lights regularly every five minutes, places down for a moment, and then forgets altogether.

Not a spark of jealousy or temper is apparent in his manner, although, as is patent to everyone, this wedding must make so grave a difference in his position.

Up to the time his uncle met Miss Ethel Sedwicke he had been his adopted son, and his guardian had made no secret of his intentions.

Estlin was to be a rich man, his uncle's sole heir, and he was therefore to prepare himself for that enviable position by learning the use, and not the abuse of riches.

Nothing that he had reasonably desired in his youth had been denied him, and never had they quarrelled upon the point of money, or disputed upon minor matters. Estlin was his adopted son, his heir; he was to fit himself for a Parliamentary career, and satisfy the livelong desire of his uncle. So it had always been understood, and Joseph Monro had laughed to scorn the oft-repeated suggestions of the younger man that a new heir might one day come upon the scene and supplant him in the course of time.

And now. Well, now the unexpected had happened, Joseph Monro had fallen in love with all the fire and ardour of a much younger man, and as the townsfolk whispered to each other, "It was all up with young Estlin." He would find that Merton House was not quite so comfortable a place when under the supervision of a young woman, however pretty she might be, and as the lady critics maintained, a good deal too pretty to be cast daily in the company of Estlin Godfry. The unanimous votes of the ladies' tea-parties of the town had decided this for him a month at least previous to the wedding, and therefore, as naturally follows when ladies take anything in hand, the whole question was settled at once. The people directly concerned in the matter did, nevertheless, exactly as they liked, and, moreover, Estlin seemed as completely satisfied as his uncle and his pretty young *fiancée*.

Still the society of the town of Maythorn had decided that it was very hard upon young Estlin, and, of course, there was no appeal, though everyone seemed to suffer more acutely than those chiefly interested.

"Estlin, my boy," Joseph Monro exclaims, on the morning of the wedding, placing his arm about his nephew's shoulders. "You understand this house must always be the same to you, as in the past, and we must be as we have always been, father and son."

"The house can never be the same to me," Estlin replies, and then, as he notices a shade of sorrow cross his uncle's face, with a laugh continues, "it will be infinitely more attractive with such a charming addition."

"Then you are not jealous, Estlin?"

"Jealous, yes, I am completely overwhelmed; I am jealous of your good fortune."

"And nothing else?"

"Absolutely nothing."

A hearty hand-shake adds weight to his fervent protestation, and then Joseph Monro says:

"I cannot ask you to witness my new will, Estlin, for you are not altogether forgotten, but I have a few words to say to you I would rather say alone, if you will come to my study for a few moments."

Estlin is about to follow his uncle when a sharp professional rat-tat-tat announces the arrival of the first of the invited guests, and in a moment the servant ushers in Monro's oldest friends, Doctor Hill, the best man, and Arthur Grindley, his solicitor.

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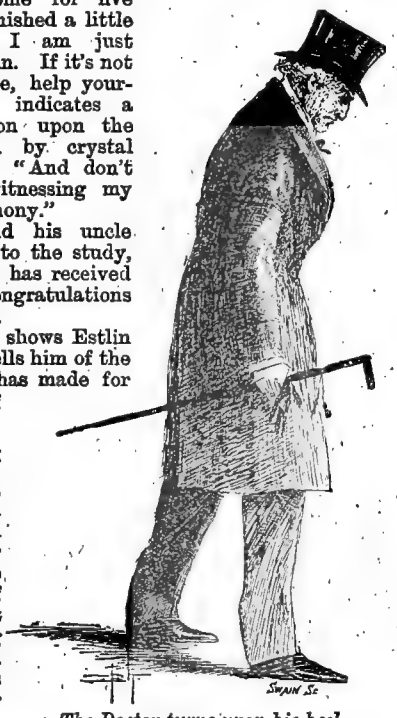
"Ah, good-morning, Benedict; congratulations, since you will do it," is the salutation of the Doctor, who is as confirmed an old bachelor as Maythorn possesses.

"Good-morning, Hill; morning, Grindley; well, make yourselves at home for five minutes till I've finished a little private business I am just settling with Estlin. If it's not too early to smoke, help yourselves," and he indicates a smoker's companion upon the sideboard flanked by crystal bottles of spirits. "And don't forget you are witnessing my will after the ceremony."



The Doctor turns upon his heel.

Then Estlin and his uncle mount the stairs to the study, and Joseph Monro has received the first and last congratulations of his wedding day.

In the study he shows Estlin his new will and tells him of the provision that he has made for him, an annuity of £1,000 a year.

"And now, God bless you, my boy," he says; "leave me, Estlin, and go down and entertain Hill and Grindley for five minutes while I write a couple of letters. I shall not be longer, then bring them up here and we'll have a glass of wine together before we start."

"My uncle," says Estlin, as he re-enters the morning room, "will be pleased to see you in his study to take a glass of wine with him in five minutes' time; he has a couple of letters to write now, if you will excuse him."

The clatter of horses' hoofs and the roll of wheels without announce the arrival of the carriages, and Estlin is detained making final arrangments below, while Hill and Grindley proceed together to Monro's study.

As Estlin stands at the window in the bright morning sunlight several of his acquaintances in the town pass by chatting on their way to the church, and their conversation is of Estlin Godfry, the only loser by that day's festivities. Of course he is remembered in the will, but they have seen this kind of thing before. The middle-aged man marrying the young woman and spending the rest of his life in legalised adoration. Estlin no doubt is still left a considerable sum, but of course, there will be half-a-dozen more wills made before the final one is read and then he'll only get a mourning ring or a paltry fifty pounds. Oh, yes, they have seen this kind of thing before, and the hybrid society of a country town never makes a mistake in its estimation of human nature—Never!

Then the lawyer returns to the morning room, but does not enter; he stands at the door until Estlin, looking his way, walks, in response to his glance, towards him.

"We are quite ready," says Estlin.

"Do you know any woman who is not a fool?" the lawyer asks him in his gentlemanly brusque style, and Estlin ventures to suggest that he has the honour of the acquaintance of such a female paragon.

"Then send her to the bride's house and let her distract her thoughts and quietly tell her that Mr. Monro has been taken unwell and will not be able to leave yet awhile. When you have done that come up to the study."

Estlin rushes out to fulfil the lawyer's instructions, and ten minutes afterwards, trembling and flurried, returns and ascends to the study, only to pause, with his limbs shaking under him, as he sees the two men standing upon the threshold, looking grave and serious, awaiting him.

They step aside to allow him to enter. His uncle is seated in his usual chair, his arms hanging by his side, his collar and tie loosened, and the doctor's stethoscope lies upon the table.

Estlin gazes anxiously at the unconscious figure, and his breath halts at the oppressive stillness. What has happened? He turns again to the two men who have followed him into the room and asks:

"How is he now?"

They do not answer him, and Estlin takes the limp hand in his own.

"He has fainted," he says; "it is excitement. He will soon recover."

"He will never recover," Doctor Hill rejoins. "Your uncle is dead!"

CHAPTER III.

A Mystery.

It is the night of the wedding day, and the bridegroom, who should have left the house with his bride, followed by the hearty wishes of all who knew him, has departed alone upon that cold, dark road, the only path from earth to eternity.

The room where he had laughed and talked that morning is vacant, save for that something lying on the bed. Something covered with a sheet, a stretch of white with hideous elevations at its either end, and that is all.

Suddenly as a lightning flash, the news had spread amongst the invited guests. What use condolences or idle words. The horror of the catastrophe, the greatness of the loss, numbed them to silence; and silence was the best.

In the library three men are sitting, with white faces, in which deep lines show the excess of that emotion which men may not give way to, earnestly conversing.

"He was dead before I entered the room," the Doctor says, addressing Estlin, "it happened in the few moments that elapsed between the time you left him and we followed to his room."

"And this will is now waste paper," the lawyer snaps, picking up the unsigned document from the table.

"It represents his wishes, and shall be the same to me as though it had been made a year ago," Estlin replies gravely.

"Tush, you talk like a boy. His last will in which you are——"

"It is not seemly to discuss this matter now," the Doctor sharply interjects, and Estlin wearily places his hand to his throbbing brow. "There are graver matters which must be settled. It is impossible for me to give a certificate with regard to your uncle's death," he continues, turning to Estlin, "absolutely impossible. There must be an inquiry."

"It will be anguish to his friends," Estlin replies, "let it be kept secret. If he had a weak heart, surely you, as his physician, are justified——"

"For his death to have occurred from heart failure is impossible, or at least so improbable that I cannot consent to take any other course than that which my duty indicates. It is next to impossible that he should die so suddenly from natural causes. He was a strong, healthy man, and one I would have given, knowing him as I did, at least another twenty years of robust life. I say, with the full knowledge of the gravity and importance of my words, he did not die a natural death."

Estlin starts in amazement to his feet, and the lawyer, aroused from his habitual composure, turns and stares open mouthed at the Doctor, who returns the glances of the two with a look of meaning, and tapping the table to emphasise his words, sharply repeats:

"He did not die from natural causes."

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"Not die from natural causes!" Estlin gasps at last. "Doctor Hill, you cannot mean that he——" he stammers and breaks down, and then in a moment slowly continues: "You must explain your words, I cannot understand them."

For answer the Doctor rises to his feet and moves towards the door, turning on the threshold towards the two who gaze at him with faces expressing nothing but bewildered consternation.

"I cannot discuss what are at present simply assumptions," he says stiffly, addressing the younger man, "but I think that I have said sufficient to indicate my intentions. A patient of mine has suddenly died under circumstances of so mysterious a character that I emphatically refuse to pretend to account for a death which to the best of my knowledge and belief should not have occurred. My duty is to make the necessary communications to the proper authorities, and that duty I shall unswervingly carry out. Gentlemen, I wish you good-night." With a formal bow the Doctor turns upon his heel, leaving the two facing each other and completely nonplussed at his behaviour. The legal mind is the first to recover itself.

"What the deuce has the old fool got in his head now?" the lawyer gasps. "Surely there is enough misery in the house without the matter being made worse by the madness of a dispenser of castor oil. Bah! the idiotic old fool! but it must be stopped; it shall be, too, or my name's not Grindley. There, there, my dear fellow," he continued hastily, clutching Estlin Godfry's hand, "I must be after him. Heaven only knows what he'll do if I don't stop him," and with a rush he departs, cursing vehemently the whole medical profession, and his greatest friend, Doctor Hill, in particular.

"You don't look well, but you haven't altered much."

With all anxiety to dissuade him from bringing the family further trouble, the good-natured but irascible lawyer hurried after Doctor Hill; but his pleadings were futile, and understanding at last that the medical man was not acting under any other influence than that of his own impressions and belief, he was reluctantly obliged to content himself with the thought that Doctor Hill was dealing honestly and in good faith, and only doing his duty to his friend who had so mysteriously passed away.

Twenty-four hours have flown before Mr. Grindley meets Estlin Godfry again, and then he has only gained his object by almost forcing himself into the house.

He has been refused admission, but impatiently scorning the message that "Mr. Estlin Godfry is engaged," literally hurls himself into the library where the young man is sitting, weary and worn, a ghost of what he was two days ago.

"My dear Godfry," he snaps, as Estlin wearily rises from his seat, "why shut yourself up like this; you will go mad if you continue in this style much longer."

"Have you heard?" Estlin hoarsely inquires. "Have you heard the horrible news that my uncle was poisoned, murdered? My God, who was the fiend who chose such a moment to strike his blow! Oh, it is horrible, horrible."

"Horrible, yes, but murder, no! It must have been a fearful accident."

"It could be no accident. A man does not play with poisons on his wedding day. It is murder, cruel, heartless, monstrous."

"No, no, my dear Estlin, you are filled with morbid ideas through shutting yourself up so much. Poor Monro must have felt overcome by excitement, taken a sedative to attempt to quiet his nerves, and overdosed himself. There can be no other solution."

"If he had taken a sedative there would have been a phial upon the table, and besides, such drugs do not act in such a manner. They do not mete out death in the twinkling of an eye."

"But your uncle had not an enemy in the world."

"He had one. It rests with us to find him."

"My dear boy, heaven forbid that I should wrong the dead, but——"

"Yes, yes, you would suggest as others do, that it was suicide." Estlin rises and impatiently paces the room. "Does a man who intends to commit suicide wait until the morning of his wedding-day to do the deed? And you were one of his greatest friends."

"It is a mystery."

"The inquest is to-morrow."

"Yes, I have heard. How is she?"

"She! Who can say? She is scarcely conscious of her grief as yet. Oh, what are we to do?"

"Do! We can do nothing. It is one of those mysteries that will never be solved."

"It must and shall be. Leave me, Grindley, leave me; you can do nothing now," Estlin exclaims at last, after a lengthy pause, and the lawyer, sobered and melancholy, can but wring his hand and depart. As he leaves, Estlin again buries his head in his hands and thinks, tortures his brain as he has done for hours, searching for the key to this inscrutable mystery. It is useless. He is brought face to face every time with the terrible facts that seem to defy interpretation. He must give it up; no one will ever solve the mystery. But stay, it flashes upon him as a flood of light. There is one man who may perchance help him. Years ago a man who had chambers in the same building in London as himself. He was not a marvellous detective who could forge a whole chain from a shattered link, for he had neither the patience nor the stability to follow a series of circumstances bit by bit, and yet, by marvellous good fortune, Estlin remembers the man had in the old days so often amused him by instantaneously snapping the answer to a seemingly impenetrable mystery that he had laid before him. It was a gift, not of deduction, but what was more like an exaggerated intuition. The gift of the Gods to woman.

To think is to act, and late that evening Estlin hurries up the stairs of his old chambers, hoping against hope to

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find that his friend Sidney Larrance has not left the neighbourhood.

Busy with his own thoughts Estlin knocks at the outer door, and in a moment finds his arms being nearly wrenched from his body by a ferocious individual attired only in his shirt and trousers, while a hearty voice growing louder with every word ejaculates.

"Estlin Godfry by all that's wonderful!"

In the grasp of the giant, Estlin is dragged into the room, thrust into into a chair, a stiff brandy-and-soda dashed into his hand, and then Sidney Larrance condescends to speak again.

"You don't look well, but you haven't altered much, Estlin. You can guess what I'm about by my costume. More paper staining. The only thing that puzzles me is that editors don't accept my yarns, but then genius must not be trammelled. If I write, let me write with freedom. Do not bind me with collars, coats or vests, let me be free, untrammelled. Free as the wave that beats upon the beach."

Suddenly Larrance pauses and saves himself from suffocation by taking a long deep breath, and then, noticing Estlin has not altered his position and still gazes moodily before him, deals him a Nasmyth hammer-like blow on the shoulder and fiercely asks:

"What's up?"

"Haven't you seen the papers?"

"No, the worst thing a man who writes can do is to read the papers. It lowers his estimation of himself. Either they have not condescended to notice his latest triumph, or they have unmercifully "slated" it. I revenge myself upon them by ignoring their criticisms, and dwell ever in the flattery of my own opinions."

"Sidney Larrance, you're the same good-tempered old cynic as ever."

"Estlin Godfry, I'm neither a cynic nor good-tempered. Simply a selfish old brute who chatters like a fool, when his friend has come miles to ask his opinion on a matter of the greatest moment.

"Forgive me, Estlin, drink your brandy-and-soda like a man, and forget that I've wasted the first five minutes of your time."

"You *know* that I have come to consult you, Sidney? Did you *know* before I arrived?"

"My dear fellow, no. When will you appreciate that I am not a prophet, a soothsayer, or a spiritualist?" He rears his gigantic frame aloft. "Do I look like either? My mother was a woman of the ultra-sensitive type, and I have inherited her neurotic temperament. Nothing more, I assure you.

"Sometimes, I know not how, I can jump at the correct solution to a mystery, but that is all. I know no more of your visit than the paper's opinions of my latest novel.

"But go on, my dear chap, go on; I'm afraid with the nerves I also inherited the family tongue."

For a quarter of an hour Estlin speaks without interruption, and then, as he finished the history of all that has occurred, sits back and anxiously watches his old friend.

He breaks the silence again and asks:

"Can you help me?"

"My dear Estlin, I'm sorry to say 'No.' My mind is at present a blank, but do not despair, I will come back with you and perhaps—" he hesitates, and then slowly continues: "but do not rely upon me. Personally, I am as helpless as you. I do not pretend to possess abnormal gifts of second sight, but by examining the scene of the tragedy something may arise to help us."

He gazes thoughtfully and pityingly at the young man a moment and then, with a sigh, envelopes himself in the remainder of his clothes and a gigantic overcoat, and together they leave the house and walk towards the station.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION.

No. 5.

24	81	70	9	36	79	57	56
72	67	35	78	59	30	6	88
80	26	94	50	83	86	85	14
18	84	1	20	3	44	54	47
32	69	21	60	34	42	13	2
16	52	82	12	41	43	77	64
40	27	17	25	73	01	28	48
63	8	71	37	45	51	99	39
31	11	4	33	22	68	65	62
7	74	29	23	61	94	55	94
87	53	38	9	91	52	69	61

A very large proportion of those readers who entered for the Picture Puzzle Competition (No. 5) announced in *Short Stories* for May 9th succeeded in putting the squares together correctly. It has been decided to award the prize of £10 to the competitor who forwarded the neatest correct solution, and the fortunate person is Mr. Joseph Baker, 9, Argyle Street, Darwen, Lancashire.

The fifty readers whose names appear below have each been sent a gold-plated pencil-case as a consolation prize for the correctness and neatness of their attempt:

G. Somerville, 14, Musard Road, W.
Mrs. Bimnoll, The Cottage, Lyncombe, Torquay.
G. Leake, 9, Greencoat Mansions, Francis Street, S.W.
H. Harris, 21, Genoa Road, Anerley, S.E.
A. Hodge, 1, Springfield Gardens, Upper Clapton, N.E.
Miss Smythe, St. Anne's House, Lewes, Sussex.
A. Buckland, 36, Hanover Street, Peckham.
A. Watson, 27, Dora Road, Small Heath, Birmingham.
Mrs. Peacock, 72, Oxford Street, South Bank, Yorkshire.
Mrs. Pritland, 1, Herbert Terrace, Alexandra Road, Plymouth.
H. Anderson, Naval Ordnance Office, Woolwich Arsenal.
Miss A. Beer, 2, Keppel Terrace, Stoke, Devonport.
J. Cross, 34, Bently Road, Kingsland Road, N.
Miss Swanwick, High Bank, Lymm, Cheshire.
W. Martinnaut, 212, Algernon Road, Ladywell.
Mrs. Jones, 36, Castlewood Road, Clapton Common.
A. Murray, 6, Campbell Terrace, Rodney Street, Hull.
H. Reading, 249, Kingsland Road, N.E.
Miss W. Sparkes, 32, Queensdown Road, Hackney Downs.
Miss F. Bellett, 85, Manor Road, Stoke Newington.
G. E. Fisher, 127, Mornington Road, Leytonstone, Essex.
W. Nichols, 41, Bird-in-Bush Road, Peckham.
H. Noble, Park House, 8, Falkland Road, Hornsey.
Mrs. Ayers, Winchester Villa, 86, Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone.
W. Carey, 124, South Bank, Lister Lane, Halifax.
T. Edwards, 262, Cambridge Road, N.E.
Miss N. Jackson, 7, St. James' Square, Bradford, Yorks.
Miss Hallam, 12, Avenue Road, South Norwood.
A. Clegg, 86, Warren Road, Leyton.
A. Lisle, 9, Maude Terrace, Walthamstow, Essex.
A. Bowles, 35, Western Street, Bradford.
G. Coote, 126, High Street, Guildford.
Mrs. Braud, 9, Newton Road, Urmston, near Manchester.
Miss Passmore, Devon Villa, Saffron Walden.
W. Johnson, 14, Penypeel Road, Canton, Cardiff.
Miss L. Wakefield, Clevemont, Silverhill, St. Leonards-on-Sea.
J. Chapman, Jubilee Cottage, Union Place, Stonehouse, Devon.
Mrs. Porter, 32, Queensdown Road, Hackney Downs, N.E.
J. Alexander, 2, Astbury Road, S.E.
W. Hood, 16, Broadway, Stratford, E.
Miss E. Young, 4, Driffield Road, Bow, E.
E. Howard, 1, Lansdowne Gardens, South Lambeth.
A. Withers, 31, West Wymer Street, Norwich.
J. Hughes, 15, Royal Place, New Cross.
T. Barber, 11, Strand Hotel Buildings, Holywell Street, W.C.
F. Louis, Fairleigh, 33, Thurleston Road, West Norwood, S.E.
J. P. Tucker, 19, Langton Street, Chelsea, S.W.
W. Woolston, 6, Hampden Street, Imperial Park, Beeston, Notts.
Max Raeder, Great Stanmore, Middlesex.

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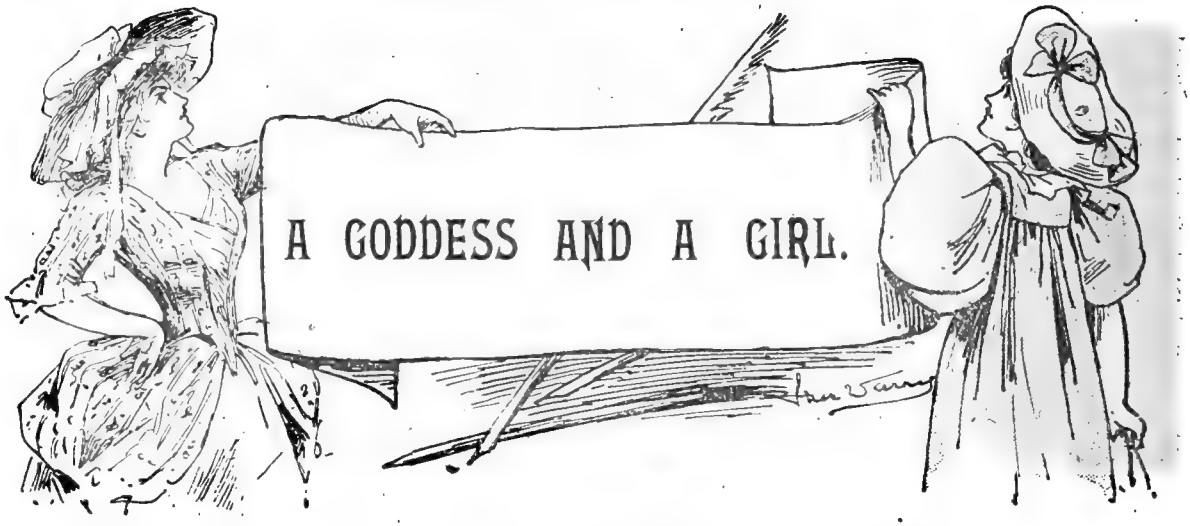

He set his face against the sun, drank through his eyes into his soul the crimson glory, turned his glance to the right, to the left, where wood and sky and a sea of measureless splendour lay; and then, with a rigid, vigorous, upward fling of the arms, called into space:

"I'm done with ye! Shine on in your false, treacherous beauty! Majestic, self-satisfied, supreme as you are, I despise you! No longer can you torment, no longer can you drive your fragrances, your alluring smiles, and your siren music through my veins—for I put you away, I renounce you—I pass on to darkness."

As he turned toward the brink of the precipice and hurried forward with his wild windswept head bent down, a figure pressed through the cool leaves of the wood and barred his progress with a strong, white arm. He raised his face again and met the steady, clear, azure gaze of a woman.

"I ha'e you!" he snarled.

"Why?" she asked softly. "You never saw me before. How do you conjure up hatred so instantly?"

"You annoy me. You obstruct me. I wish to get on till I pass over the edge of that sharp jaw of rock and fall down to forgetfulness—and peace."

"What an absurd egotist you are," said she, her red lips curling into a disdainful, beautiful smile.

Her word struck him like an icy spray and took the deadly heat out of the passion that was burning through his brain and heart. Standing as he had stood a moment before, scorning the whole earth, casting the contempt of his soul straight at the full beneficence of God; putting behind him, like a martyred hero, the defeats and disappointment of a profitless, dreary, black career, and reeling madly towards death, as a bewildered beast leaps into consuming fire, he had palpitated with desperate, defiant pride. There was then a roaring voice within him that said he had done his best, and said that he had done too well, and that the earth was too mean to comprehend him. He had felt that he was tossing the world aside as a maturing child would spurn a toy theatre, and passing on to an oblivion that was the only possible state of happiness for one of his mental and moral dimensions. And now before him stood a woman, a young woman, with a wide, white brow, quiet, cool eyes, and a voice that was the music of perfect repose. A wave of humiliation swept rather sickeningly through him.

"Who are you?" he muttered.

"Well, call me Patience," she replied. "The name is as good as any."

He looked at her from head to foot. She was like a marble statue, except that a mantle of fluctuant, glistening hair swept in semi-transparent profusion around her shoulders.

"Patience!" he repeated. "Patience!"

"Yes," she returned, smiling, as a rose might smile if it had a heart. "I am known by that name to some. Others have called me—Stupidity."

He brushed the hair back from his eyes and brow, and looked intently upon her. She seemed marvellously white and pure as she faced him there in the sunshine. There was a soft, golden haze mingled in the blue of her eyes, and a moisture lay on her lips like dew on a flower. She clasped her hands behind her head, and gazed through her drooping lashes at this young man who was bent on self-destruction.

"Poor, weak fellow!" she said. "You no longer care to live? You find no beauties here on earth worthy of your admiration?"

"None," he replied.

"Well, well! That long green valley off there, with the sun on it, is not good enough for you. The vast blue and gold of that sky above us bores you. The majestic trees with their glittering multitude of leaves, and with the birds singing rapturously through them are dull, uninteresting things in your eyes. Ah, me, what wonderful men are born! You are a very wonderful man, sir!"

He glared at her.

"You are presumptious to make game of me," he muttered.

She smiled again.

"Are you a poet?" she asked.

"The world says I am not," he replied bitterly.

A little laugh rippled from the woman's throat.

"Unappreciative and deplorable world!" she said. "You have laboured in vain to prove yourself an inspired bard?"

"For eight years," he made reply, "I have sung the best songs that surged within me."

"It was a noble, glorious music that you made?"

"It was the best I knew."

"And it was not victorious?"

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"No."

"Therefore——"

"Therefore—I am weary, and wish to pass from this dream that we call life to that other that is surely sweeter—death."

She turned her eyes away and looked down into the peaceful, radiant valley.

"This is the strength of man," she mused to herself.

He studied the movement of her curved lips angrily.

"Nearly all," she went on, "are like this puny, dejected, limp mortal. They make one strong fight, and then descend to earth and beat their lazy wings with despair. Another race of men must follow this one of cowards and drones. These have not the hearts that deserve the myriad that heaven showers upon them. Humanity is a failure."

She ceased her musings, and again turned to the man.

"It might be better had I advised you to tumble over that precipice, as you were bent on doing. I should judge that you were of no use to yourself or the world, and to silence you would possibly be a boon to mankind. It is however, my duty to guard humans, so far as I can, from the consequences of their own madness. I live on the earth only for the purpose of encouraging moderation, gentleness and common sense, and I am bound to oppose foolhardiness wherever I meet it. Personally I might enjoy abandoning you to your fate, but I must not. So I say to you, go back. Seek once again in the world the contentment and peace of mind that are possible to all. If you have striven eight years to acquire fame, and failed, then smile at your own lack of fortune, and strive eight years more, and then eight years more, and so, on and on, till the hand of death takes yours unsought; and even then smile and thank God that he has been so merciful to one so mean."

She had risen, tall and glorious above him, pointing upward to the arching vault of heaven as she spoke, her eyes dilating, and the firm, commanding force of divinity shining in her face. He cowered under the fierceness of her gaze, shielding his eyes with his arms. When he looked again she was gone. On the low branch of the birch tree, whose leaves had almost touched her golden locks when she stood before him, a bird with a critical brown eye and an opaline throat scrutinised him curiously for a moment and then flew up towards the sun, and he was alone.

He went back to the haunts of men and began life anew.

* * * * *

It was a ball in Mrs. Hooper's house, that great mansion in the square, with a domed ballroom, in which beauty acquired a fairy fineness against a background of white and gold, and garlands of frescoed roses. The dance was at its height when Mrs. Hooper, standing on tip-toe and shading her eyes with a white ostrich fan, gazed in one particular direction for a moment and then uttered a little exclamation. She had discovered someone whose appearance surprised her. It was a tall, pale, good-looking young man who stood on the threshold of the ballroom, and towards whom Mrs. Hooper sped, as a gorgeously-plumaged bird would half fly and run across the lawn.

"Why, you dear fellow," she cried, catching the new-comer's arm. "However did you get here? I had no idea you'd come. Why, you haven't shown yourself at a dance for years."

The young man smiled.

"I've decided to go into the world again," said he. "I'll only look and not dance. I've never been in this new room of yours before. Isn't it beautiful——"

He stopped speaking and caught spasmodically at his hostess's hand, which still lingered lightly on his sleeve.

"Who—is that—that girl?" he whispered.

Mrs. Hooper followed his gaze and laughed.

"Oh, of course she would catch your eye. But, my dear boy! You are positively as white as a sheet."

"Who is she, who is she?" he asked again impatiently.

"Why, Patience Endicott, to be sure."

He turned such a wild gaze upon Mrs Hooper that that lady suddenly feared he was mad, and shivered.

"Patience," he gasped. "My God! Is that her name?"

Mrs. Hooper was now sure that something was radically wrong with him. She dreaded a scene, and cast a quick glance about to see if any trustworthy aid could be summoned without alarming the company.

"What ails you, what is the matter?" she murmured, trying to turn the young man about, with the intention of getting him into the hall. He suddenly seemed to realise he was acting wildly.

"Pardon me," he said in a natural voice. "I owe you an explanation. I have been strangely moved, Mrs. Hooper, by the sight of Miss Endicott. I am quite sure that I never met her, but she is like someone I knew. I cannot explain to you now why the shock at seeing her affected me so. Might I meet Miss Endicott?"

"By all means," laughed the hostess, at once reassured. She hastened over the ballroom floor, with the young poet in her wake.

"Patience, dear, let me introduce an old friend, Mr. Carleton—Geoffrey, this is the nicest girl in or out of paradise, Patience Endicott."

The same azure eyes, suffused with a golden haze and shadowed by long, velvety lashes were turned upon him, and he quailed under their steady, calm gaze.

"We have met before," he found voice to say.

"No, I think not," she replied in even tones, slightly elevating her brows.

"On the brink of a precipice," he went on. "Did we not stand there together one day, not long ago, and you told me I was an egotist?"

"No," she said softly. "The circumstance you mention is wholly strange to me."

He straightened himself and looked down upon her with troubled eyes.

"It is true then," he said sadly, "that I am not myself—that there is something wrong—here," tapping his forehead. "Miss Endicott, it seems to me that my mind is clear, and to me it is all rational and right, when I tell you that I once before now looked on your face, heard your voice, and—thought you sublime. The words you uttered to me swerved me from a terrible purpose and saved me from destruction. It was but a dream—an hallucination—and I am, indeed, in a sad, forlorn condition. My mind has given away—I am mad. And I thought I had found patience."

* * * * *

"Simply brain fever, my dear Mrs. Hooper," said old Doctor Trevelyan, as he warmed his coat tails in front of the fire in the big library. "He was morbid, overworked, and, I think, dissipated. Drank too much brandy, slept about three hours a night, and fairly defied Nature. Oh, that idea of his about the girl? It's nothing at all. It might have been anything else. He might have raved over blue monkeys trying to strangle him, or told you of

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taking a trip along the bottom of the ocean and drinking afternoon tea with a mermaid. That scene with Patience on the edge of the precipice, and the confusing of the figure with your friend, Miss Endicott, was an instantaneous, lightning-like fantasy that flitted across his brain just as he stood looking on the real girl for the first time. Her placid beauty intimidated and awed him. It reminded him of his own fevered state and rebuked himself.

"And yet, by Jove! what a peculiar sermon was in that dream of his! Now that he is all right, I hope that, in his limp and passive condition, he may dwell upon and profit by the beauty of the fine flash of sanity that blazed through his madness. For one instant he saw the futility and unwholesomeness of selfish, ill-regulated, and unbridled ambition, and was made to understand the sweet virtue of patience. My dear Mrs. Hooper, patience is a virtue. We find very little of it in these days. We are living very fast, and the most excitable of us cannot stand the pace. We must all of us beat our neighbours in all that we attempt, or else we grow morose and discontented. This young man was unusually sensitive. He was an egotist, in the highest acceptance of the term. After labouring several years he expected to find the world at his feet, and when he did not accomplish this end, he grew bilious and defiant. Then, through brooding and irregular life, he became ill, and the fever took possession of his brain. Well, he was lucky to have had such care. It was eminently humane of you and your husband to put him to bed here when he fainted in the ballroom. A more practical and less tender woman than yourself would have sent him to a hospital. Good-day, madam. Let no one see the patient, except, perhaps, Miss Endicott."

* * * * *

Upon the side of a russet hill, and overlooking a valley sparkling with frosted verdure, through which a narrow, white river is threaded, is a small stone house with a spacious sweep of verandah on three sides. It is November, and a genial-looking young man in corduroys, who has just clambered down the path of the hill, swings a string of partridges from his shoulder on to a rustic table, stands his fowling-piece in a corner, and calls:

"Hey! You unequalled beauty—where are you?"

There is a light step within the house, a swish of skirts, and a very beautiful woman stands smiling in the doorway.

"Lucky again, Geoffrey," she says, glancing at the heap of birds.

"Always lucky," he replies, advancing to her and throwing his arm about her waist.

"How could I be anything else? You bring me luck. Now, what have you been doing while I was in the woods, you luminous angel?"

"Oh, I've been ruling all the red lines under the stage directions in your manuscript, and I couldn't help reading a lot of the dialogues as I went along, Geoffrey. It's wonderfully bright. The play can't help being a great success."

Geoffrey quietly lighted a cigar, smiling in an utterly contented way while doing it.

"Well, if it fails—what harm? I'm sure I don't care," he said.

He threw the match down the slope towards the valley.

"Failure," he said contemptuously. "Let the madman rave at failure! As for me"—drawing his lungs full of fresh air—"why, the world is mine, because"—crossing to where his wife stood, and taking her hands—"because Patience at last is mine!"

Edith Summers.

RESULT OF FIRST BRAIN GYMNASIUM COMPETITION.

A large number of competitors entered for this competition, and the majority of them came very near answering all the problems correctly. One of the guineas goes to Mr. John A. Read, 1, Florence Villas, Cavendish Road, Merton; the other guinea goes to Mr. W. H. Deeble, 25, Arwenack Street, Falmouth. Consolation prizes in the shape of gold-plated pencil-cases have been sent to fifty of the competitors whose attempts are considered to be sufficiently meritorious.

Key No. 1.

An express train often travels at the rate of sixty miles an hour, and then signals will be passed every four minutes, and it can readily be understood that an engine travelling at that high rate of speed will require constant attention.

Key No. 2.

(*a*) Cap, lap, law, low. 3 moves.
(*b*) Slow, slot, soot, loot, lost, last, fast. 6 moves.
(*d*) Pound, pour'd, pours, pouts, bouts, boats, boars, bears, beans, peans, peons, peony, penny. 12 moves.
(There are other ways of doing these, equally short. They have been counted correct).
(It is not possible to do "c" and "e," under the conditions of the competition).

Key No. 3.

N—ine.
O—bey.
R—oar.
T—ees.
H—ard.
P—ill.
O—pen.
L—imb.
E—arn.

Key No. 4.

1— 9 Mirth.
2—10 India.
3—11 Racer.
4—12 Alter.
5—13 Bukki.
6—14 Ewers.
7—15 Arago.
8—16 Union.

Perimeter... ... Mirabaue.
Hub... ... .. Harrison.

Key No. 5.

Competition.—Numerical Value = 457.

Key No. 6.

MINISTERS
MANKIND
BREAD
ODE
A
ADA
CIDER
VILLAIN
MUTTERING

Key No. 7.

Run—Fifty-two different meanings.

Key No. 8.

Coldstream.

Key No. 9.

(a).

T	R	I	M
R	O	S	E
I	S	L	E
M	E	E	T

(b).

M	E	A	N
G	L	U	M
L	O	R	E
U	R	S	A

Key 10.

"Dear my Lady Golden Hair,
Why averted glances?
Why disfavour, lady fair?
Tell me how it chances."

As she shakes her head there flies
Golden mist that shrouds her eyes;
Still as other rosebud's tips
Stay my lady's folded lips.

"Tell me how I fell from grace,
Tell me where I stumbled,
Oh! do not keep a frowning face,
See how I am humbled!"

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The Brain Gymnasium

No. 4. NEW SERIES.

TWO PRIZES OF A GUINEA EACH.

BELOW will be found the fourth batch of ten problems in the new series of The Brain Gymnasium. Two prizes of a Guinea each are offered weekly to those competitors who answer correctly the greatest number of these problems.

Consolation Prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

Rules:

1. All solutions to be written clearly on one sheet of paper.
2. Do not write the questions; simply put the numbers and the answer against each.
3. Each set to contain the £100 coupon (found on second page of cover) for the current week.
4. All attempts to be in by Monday, June 1st.
5. Mark your envelope "Gymnasium, Number 4."

(31.) Charade.

My first is the meal of a certain cereal boiled.
My second signifies space.
My third is an edible fungus.

(32.) How many words can be made out of "conceivable" without altering the arrangement of the letters? Give the words, and the total against each.

Example: Wards—war, wad, was, as. Four moves.

(33.) The initials and finals of the words defined below spell words which signify:

(*a*) Warbling, (*b*) Bearing leaves like grass.

(*a*) Departure.
The fruit of the oak.
A Jewish doctor.
To snarl.

(*b*) An animal of the dolphin family.
A piece of verse.
A term in music.
A farinacious food.
Pertaining to an inauguration.
A messenger from the Pope.
A leaf inserted between leaves.

(34.) Example: Curtail "a piece of music" and leave "a male child."

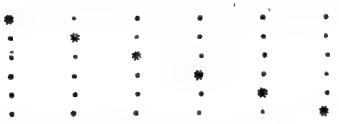
Solution: SON—G.

Solve the following problems in the same way:

1. Curtail "dirty" and leave "fierce."
2. Curtail "yours" and leave "lean."
3. Curtail "a bone" and leave "an expression of surprise."
4. Curtail "a mock pearl" and leave "a fruit."

(35.) Supposing you paid a 1d. for every capital letter on this page; 1½d. for every seven digits; and 1¾d. a dozen for the ordinary letters. How much would you pay for the whole?

(36.) Each of the dots below represents a letter, and those letters which fall on the asterisks will spell a word familiar to our readers.



(37.) The following sentence is written in cypher. Translate it.

Thfrf js cpnsjdfrbbly lfss trpvblf jn brrbngjng b cyphfr sfntfncf thbn thfrf js jn fjndjng b splvtjpn tp jt.

(38.) The following letters, when arranged in their proper order, form three sentences. The punctuation marks are in their correct relative positions.

1. a b c c c e e e e i k k l l n o p r r ' s s t u w y.
2. a a c d d e i j m n o o o r r ' s s t.
3. a a d e e e e e f h h i i l m n o o o r s ' s, t t t u v.

(39.) The following sentence, when reconstructed, forms a readable sentence:

Early delayed by his already long, courier next letter walking on to pouch leit leather quickly, and the destination and more too been this day he was with one in for had he too letter the to reach ought forwarded first be if its it.

(40.) What word on this page has the greatest numerical value?

i = 20. j = 50. m = 1. d = 47.

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The Rural Postman.

I.

He was a fine young fellow. Big, strong, and well built, he carried his head high—a head as fair as that of a child, with frank and direct blue eyes, a mouth around which a smile always played, and a red moustache jauntily turned up at the ends.

Everyone saluted him, as he passed, with a nod or a friendly "Good-day," and the peasants often invited him into their cottages to eat a morsel and to drink a glass of their light wine. He ate and drank standing, with his eyes fixed on the clock that was rarely missing from the sitting-rooms; and when it was time to go, he would always set out with a song on his lips.

Everyone knew him and everyone liked him, from Mougy to Salves; and when people spoke of him, they said: "He is a brave man."

And so he was. An army medal, as brilliant as on the day that he received it, glittered on his chest, throwing, as it were, a ray of glory upon the humble blouse of the rural postman. He was proud of it, too! At any rate, it showed the world that he had served his country, and that it was away in some far land, in battle, that he had lost his right arm. For he was maimed, poor fellow, and the sleeve of his blouse, doubled up, stopped just at the height of the medal.

"Good-day! Good-day!" the country folk cried to him when they saw him pass their house or their field. It was always a kindly greeting, and the brave fellow well deserved it.

II.

It is a hard life, a rural postman's; and when one thinks of it one pities the fate of these unfortunate men, who, in all weathers and all seasons, through the heat of summer and the cold of winter, up hill and down dale, traverse the woods and the ravines, climb the mountains, and sometimes cover miles at a stretch in the sweltering heat or the driving snow in order to carry to some cottage a bit of paper which takes up so small a space in their haversack.

It is a hard life, indeed, and withal so ill-paid. Some £30 or £40 a year with which to keep from starving, and for that to walk from morning till night, growing foot-sore, tearing oneself with the brambles in the wood, heating one's blood in the fire of June and freezing it in the frosts of January.

Well, in spite of all its drawbacks, Pierre Ladello loved the life, and would not have changed it even had he been offered double the salary for less toilsome work. He loved it, and nothing frightened him—neither the rain which soaked him to the skin, nor the snow which enveloped him in its shroud, nor the wind which hurled itself against him; he feared nothing, he dreaded nothing.

The reason was that, half-way between Salves and Mougy, there stood a little red-tiled house, a poor, isolated building, on the threshold of which a sweet-faced girl awaited him as he passed on his rounds. He always entered the house and rested a few minutes in the sitting-room, which was shady and cool in the summer and in the winter filled with a brightness shed from the hearth. He would talk a few moments with the mother kiss the girl on the forehead, and then set out again.

She was his *fiancée*. They were to be married one fine day in the coming April—the month that fills the trees with song, and gives to the delicate wild roses their dawn-coloured dress. And they looked forward to this sweet month of April with great impatience, they spoke of it in all their vows, and already formed many projects for the future.

How happy they would be in their humble home! They would have more of joy than the rich and powerful, for they would possess peace of heart, tranquility of mind, and their mutual love. Despite their poverty they would not suffer; the good God Who watches over all His creatures, from the highest to the lowest, would come to their aid. With His help work would not fail them, and He would recompense them according to their worth. At night they would rest from the fatigue of the day's journey and the day's work, with a grateful hymn of praise in their hearts and a prayer on their lips.

All this would come at the time when Nature renewed herself, in the first month of the spring, which made the flowers grow, and the name of which sounded in their ears like delicious music:

April! April!

III.

April returned and cried abruptly: "Behold me!"

At once, in order to make way for him, the snow which still covered the country disappeared, and he could at his pleasure throw flowers among the grass, hang up nests in the trees, and laughingly show his suncrowned head above the spring foliage.

He brought with him the grateful warmth which gave comfort to man, and made the plants grow, and he put more music still in the hearts of Pierre Ladello and his promised bride.

You should have seen with what nimble steps the rural postman now covered the roads, freed at last from the frost and ice, and with what a radiant smile Suzanne received him. They were to be married at the end of the month, and already the young girl was making her wedding dress—a beautiful dress of blue cashmere, to the body of which she meant to pin a spray of orange blossoms. Pierre had ordered a new suit which would afterwards serve him for Sundays and holidays.

And the mother prayed to God from the depths of her heart to bless their projects and their coming union.

IV.

But the April they had awaited with such impatience came to bring mourning. One day Pierre arrived later than usual at the residence of his *fiancée*. If the sun

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had made the flowers grow, it had also melted the snows, and now the streams were converted into little rivers. One of them in particular, which ordinarily ran dry, was suddenly swollen at this point to such an extent that the rural postman had had to make a wide detour. He found Suzanne anxious because of this involuntary delay on his part. She did not even smile in her customary fashion; that was due, no doubt, to the fact that, having spent more time *en route*, he could now hardly stay a moment by her side.

One kiss only for his *fiancée*, and already he was off again. Must he not arrive exactly at the hour fixed for the arrival of the courier? As it happened, he had only one letter to carry, but it was pressing, and had been paid for.

"Here, my boy!" an old peasant had cried, as the postman had passed his house, "take that for me, will you? You will save me a journey to the town."

"Very well, father Marienne."

"And take care that no one steals it on the way. There's a good bit of money inside, you know," he continued, handing Pierre the envelope, on which the address was scrawled in a bad handwriting.

"Oh! Don't be afraid!" replied the postman. "There are no brigands in this neighbourhood that I know of, and besides, I have my toy. See."

He showed a revolver, which never quitted his side during his long rounds.

"That's right!" said the peasant. "That satisfies me. To-night, when you return, you shall have a drink; I will wait for you. Ah! I forget. It is sure to reach early to-morrow, that letter?"

"Yes, certain."

"It's for my son, you see."

"That will be all right," was the postman's reassurance.

And he left with this one letter in his leather pouch, walking more quickly, for he had already been delayed too long, and the letter ought to be forwarded on by the first courier if it was to reach its destination early the next day.

V.

Suzanne watched him afar off. She loved him so much, this dear creature, that in spite of his disablement, no man was so handsome in her eyes; and she thought "Soon I shall be his wife!" with an indescribable joy.

All at once a resounding cry reached her ears.

Pierre heard it too, far he turned round quickly, thinking, perhaps, that it came from the house; but, seeing Suzanne at the door, he continued on his way, still listening.

Hardly had he advanced a few steps when another cry, a despairing call for help again arrested him, and he asked himself whence it came.

But Suzanne was already running towards the stream that passed near the house, and of which one could see the footbridge in the neighbouring meadow.

"Pierre! Pierre! It's here!"

He rejoined her in less than two minutes, and both leaned anxiously over the water, which had become muddy and deep at this spot, and very rapid.

"Well," he said, "someone cried out. Perhaps it was not here."

"I am sure the voice came from this side," she replied; "and—look!—see, there, Pierre, what is that floating on the water? It looks like—it is a hat!"

He leaned more forward still, and, with the aid of a switch, succeeded in drawing up out of the water a child's hat, which Suzanne at once recognised.

"Ah! good Heavens!" she murmured. "It is little Toine Marchand who has fallen in. I saw him pass just now, and I know this is his hat. But, what are you doing, Pierre? Are you going to——"

He did not give her time to finish the sentence.

"Take my bag, quick, Suzanne, and carry the letter on if necessary," he said. "I am going to save the child."

Before she could even hold him back or cling to him—for it was a real danger for Pierre to hazard himself thus, maimed as he was—he threw himself into the water without reflection, with this one idea present to his mind—he must save the little one.

Could he reach him! Ah, yes, he did that; but how to remount to the surface, with one arm missing and the other paralysed by the grip of the struggling child.

If only he had two arms! He wrestled, made superhuman efforts; but the child, in the spasm of agony, perhaps, clutched, clutched! The unfortunate young man could not even make him lose his hold, and felt his strength going. He was exhausted, and was being carried away by the current.

"Help! Help!" cried Suzanne.

But the countryside was deserted, the houses were far off, and no one heard her.

"Help!" she repeated.

Alas!

She remained there, with her terrified eyes fixed on the water, and counted the seconds by the beating of her heart. But the seconds—the minutes, succeeded each other, the time passed on, and her unfortunate lover did not come to the surface.

Then, thinking that perhaps he would re-appear farther down, she commenced to run along the bank of the swollen stream.

"And—the bag?" she thought suddenly.

She retraced her steps, and picking it up, pressed it to her bosom, to cherish the warmth that is still retained of the beloved body that had now disappeared. Then she resumed her hopeless quest.

By-and-bye, as she met nobody who could come to her aid, and as she could no longer deceive herself as to the fate of Pierre, she ran on, almost without stopping, to the town; and the clerks at the little post-office saw her enter among them, her appearance scared and her eyes haggard.

"Here!" she said, holding out the bag. "There is a letter inside that Pierre spoke to me about; it is paid for, as—as he is dead—drowned. If I had not brought it, they—might have thought—perhaps, that he was—gone with—this letter. I—did not want—them to think that!"

They made her sit down, they questioned her, they endeavoured to reassure her; and, the alarm being given, a search was at once made, which resulted in the discovery of the unfortunate young man's body not far from Mougy; and that of the child Toine as well, for the boy still clung to the arm of the drowned man.

It is some years since this happened. Suzanne still lives, but she remains faithful to the memory of her dead lover; and in the house where he stopped each day as he pursued his rounds, she grows old, religiously guarding in the depths of her heart the remembrance of the poor rural postman.

Jean Burancy.

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THE WYTHECOMBE MYSTERY

BY JOHN K. LEYS, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

SUMMARY.

WHILE on a sketching tour in Wales, LAUNCELOT VERE gets into a dangerous position on the face of a precipice. His life is saved by WINIFRED DENVERS, to whom he becomes engaged. On the wedding morning LAUNCELOT fails to put in an appearance at church, and no news can be heard of him. Miss UNWIN, the village schoolmistress, has disappeared at the same time. HAROLD KENYON, a friend of LAUNCELOT'S, determines to leave Wythecombe in search of his friend.

KATHERINE DALE, A young lady with whom HAROLD KENYON is in love.
PAUL SHENSTONE, Engaged to KATHERINE DALE.
REV. MARK DENVERS, Rector of Wythecombe, and WINIFRED'S father.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH BEGINS.

HAROLD KENYON was a thorough Englishman—plain featured, though of pleasing expression, stoutly built, energetic, unimaginative—a complete contrast to his friend, Launcelot Vere, and both in appearance and (in many points) in character, a contrast to him. They had known each other first in London, when Vere was a poor and struggling artist. The young painter's better fortune dated from an acquaintance he had formed with a Mr. Pascoe, a wealthy man who had known Vere's father. This Mr. Pascoe was now dead; but he had been of great service to the artist, taking him down to stay at his house at Richmond and paint pictures for him there, and introducing him to his friends, men of substance, who occasionally purchased Vere's canvases.

To write a hurried note to Miss Dale.

Kenyon remembered those byegone days as he strode along towards Miss Unwin's cottage; and he remembered, too, that never once had he heard this woman's name from his friend's lips. But seeing that (according to Shenstone's account) Vere certainly knew her, this was not much to build upon. It was the fact that the two had disappeared almost simultaneously that troubled Kenyon.

His face was grave when he knocked at Miss Unwin's door. It was graver still when he turned away. The schoolmistress had left home suddenly on the Tuesday morning, leaving the assembled children to wait for her in vain. She had given no notice of her intention to anyone; and she had taken with her the greater part of her belongings. Surely, thought Kenyon, if she had been called away for any legitimate reason she would have sent a message to the Rector.

Kenyon only remained in the village long enough to write a hurried note to Miss Dale.

"I am going up to town this afternoon," he wrote. "If possible I shall be back by Sunday, and as soon as I return, I will call and tell you what I have done. Of course, if I hear any good news, I will telegraph immediately."

"Good news!" he said to himself as he sealed his note. "What good news can I expect? Either Launcelot is dead or seriously ill, or he has played the part of a scoundrel."

For a few seconds he stood with the sealed note in his hand, wondering whether it was not taking a liberty to send it. Kenyon's relations with Miss Dale were somewhat peculiar. When he first met her he had been greatly struck, not merely by her beauty, but by her manner and bearing. There was nothing haughty, still less anything affected, about the girl; yet she seemed to belong to a sphere quite above that in which she was placed.

Unknown to himself, Harold was already deeply in love with her when he learned that she was engaged to be married to Paul Shenstone. From that time he had avoided meeting her, yet they had occasionally seen each other; and once—once only—Harold had seen a look in her face which made his heart beat as if it would suffocate him—a look which seemed to tell him that if he had wooed her before her hand was promised to another, he might have won her.

But after that day she had treated him with a marked coldness; and he hardly knew whether she would not be displeased at his writing to her. Yet she was his only channel of communication with Miss Denvers, for he did not know the family at the Rectory, though he was acquainted with the Rector; and he was anxious that Launcelot's bride should know that something was being done to clear up the mystery that had darkened her life.

So he despatched the note and set out for Darnport at once. He had only time to throw some things into a portmanteau, snatch a few mouthfuls of food, and catch the afternoon express for London.

Early next morning Kenyon rang the bell of a house in Cumber Street, the house in which Vere had rented a flat. He hardly expected to learn any news of his friend, but he thought he might possibly find in his rooms something that would give a hint as to what had become of him.

Vere had not come back, nor had he sent any letter or telegram.

The deserted studio was in the utmost disorder—pictures, draperies, packing-boxes, and "properties" were huddled together in confusion.

"At least," said Harold to himself, "this does not tell of a premeditated flight."

In the sitting-room things presented much the same aspect; and after some hesitation Kenyon began to search for something—anything—which would help to throw light upon his friend's disappearance.

A large leather portmanteau lay in one corner half-packed. That, thought Kenyon, seemed to make it clear that there had been no elopement. But then he noticed, shortly afterwards, that a smaller bag, which had often accompanied Vere and himself in their holiday rambles, was missing. This looked odd.

The bookcase was almost stripped of its contents; but on a shelf where it had evidently been concealed when the books were in their places, Harold noticed a large phial. He took it down, uncorked it, and smelt it. It had contained laudanum.

For one moment the wild thought troubled him—could Vere have destroyed himself? Then he remembered that a year or two before Vere had told him that he had been suffering a great deal from neuralgia, and had been in the habit of taking opium to deaden the pain; but had, after a struggle, given it up, because the drug was gaining too great a hold on him. Most likely, thought Kenyon, the phial was a forgotten relic of that period. Its appearance proved as much, for it was covered with dust.

On another shelf Harold found an empty case, lined with red velvet. It looked as if it had been made for a revolver. He closed the case, and put it aside, and then turned to the writing-table. Among the various objects that lay scattered over the table was a small pocket diary. This he snatched up eagerly. The day that had been fixed for the wedding was marked with a cross. But there were no entries that seemed likely to be of any service, except one. In the division marked *Tuesday*, in the same week Launcelot had written: "*Beaumont, 8 p.m.*"

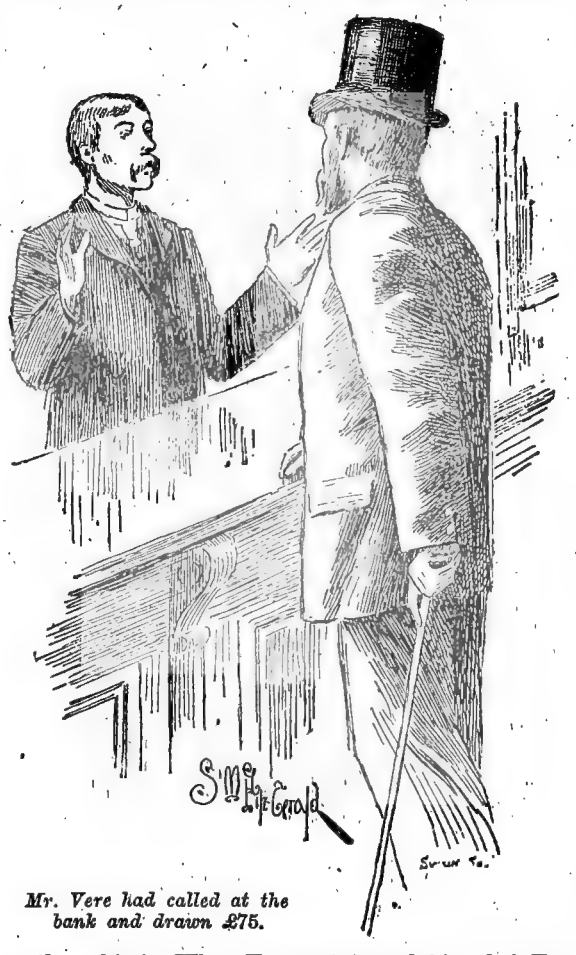
Kenyon thought he had heard his friend speak of an acquaintance named Beaumont. He fancied he was a solicitor, or a solicitor's clerk. But the diary contained no hint of the business which was to be the subject of the interview that Tuesday night, nor any clue to Beaumont's address. However, Kenyon made up his mind to see this man. He slipped the diary into his pocket, and began hunting among the papers that were strewed about the table. Not one of them was of the slightest importance; not one of them gave the smallest hint of any intention on Vere's part to take any extraordinary step.

After a moment's hesitation Harold tried the drawers of the writing-table. They were all unlocked, and the few papers they contained revealed nothing.

There was nothing more to be done; but before going away Kenyon questioned the people of the house a second time. All they could tell him was that Mr. Vere left the house on Tuesday afternoon about five o'clock, without saying where he was going or when he would return. He had no luggage with him. He wore the ordinary morning dress a gentleman wears in London; and he also had on a light grey overcoat, as it was a wet afternoon.

Kenyon stowed away these scanty details in his memory, and having left his address that a telegram might be sent to him the moment anything was heard of the missing man, he drove straight to Scotland Yard.

The case was duly entered, but the superintendent on duty did not feel called upon to offer any advice or remarks



Mr. Vere had called at the bank and drawn £75.

on the subject. When Kenyon informed him that Vere had been on the eve of his marriage when he disappeared, he nodded sagaciously, as much as to say that that fact might of itself account for everything. But when Harold went on to inform him that a young woman who had been living in the village where the marriage was to have taken place, and who was known to Vere, had left her home at the same time, the superintendent's features relapsed into a grin.

"Seems to me that may be the explanation of the gentleman's conduct, sir," he remarked with a confidential air.

"There is nothing to show that the two events are connected in the slightest degree," said Harold sharply.

"There is nothing to show anything as yet," remarked the official. "But take my word for it—if you hunt for the young woman and find her, you'll find the young gentleman not far off."

Shenstone's words came back to Kenyon's mind. The policeman had put the thing more coarsely; but it was evident that it would be absurd to resent the insinuation.

"I know Mr. Vere, and I am sure you are wrong," he said quietly. "Will you see that a description of the missing gentleman is sent to all the police stations?"

The superintendent promised that this should be done, and added that it would be well to visit the hospitals.

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This Kenyon had already resolved to do. He visited the nearest hospitals and telegraphed to the others. But it was all in vain. Vere had not been admitted to any of them; and when he had ascertained the fact Kenyon hardly knew whether he should be glad or sorry. In spite of himself he was beginning to think that Shenstone and the superintendent of police might perhaps be right. Miss Unwin might have had a hold on Launcelot which he could not shake off. She might have learned some secret of his, and insisted on his marrying her as the price of her silence. But it was all dim conjecture—fruitless guessing.

In the afternoon Kenyon called at the bank at which Vere kept his account, where he learned that on the Tuesday morning Mr. Vere had called at the bank and drawn £75, which sum was paid to him in gold and notes.

"That looks as if he had not run away; the sum is too small to last any time," said Kenyon to himself as he left the bank, "and yet, I don't know, he might think it enough for the time being."

As Harold turned his steps westward it occurred to him that if there really was any connection between Vere and this Miss Unwin, surely there must be some trace of her at Vere's rooms—some letter, or sketch, or photograph. He went back to Cumber Street, and entered the studio. In one corner there were several portfolios filled with sketches.

"If you find Miss Unwin . . . . you will find our friend, too."

Kenyon set himself to examine them, wishing at the same time that he had thought of inquiring what Miss Unwin was like. Two of the portfolios were full of sketches of landscapes. But the third contained a series of heads in outline. Amongst them Kenyon came across a sketch which struck him as being remarkable.

It was the head of a woman—not a girl, but a woman of, perhaps, five or six and twenty. It was a singular face—very long for its breadth, dark, handsome, yet not altogether pleasing. The eyes looked out from under heavy eyebrows; there was a severe look, that was also one of pain, about the mouth. The next sketch Kenyon turned over was a drawing of the same head. The attitude was different, but the face was the same. The next sketch to that, and the next, and the next presented the same features. Nor was this all. Among the pictures Kenyon found a carefully-finished portrait of the same woman. It was easy to see that it was a good likeness, and that much labour had been spent on it. The dark eyes looked as if they held some painful secret. One hand—not plump and smooth, but thin and muscular—rested on the breast, as if it were crushing down some words that were not to be uttered. Was this a portrait of Miss Unwin? "If so," said Harold to himself, "she is no common woman."

After thinking a moment he selected one of the sketches, wrapped it up, and carried it away with him.

There remained one person who must be seen—Mr. Beaumont, the man whose name Vere had jotted down in his diary.

This gentleman's name was in the law list—Kenyon's memory had been accurate on that point—and he had an office in the city. But it was too late to call there that night. There was nothing for it but to wait till the next day, and Kenyon spent the night at the Great Western Hotel.

Next morning he presented himself at Mr. Arthur Beaumont's office. He was not kept waiting. Mr. Beaumont was too young a lawyer to have many clients.

He was a short, stout, florid young man, with small brown eyes, a rough yellow moustache, and a wide mouth. He remembered his engagement with Mr. Vere very well. But Mr. Vere had not kept it. He was rather surprised, he added, that the appointment had not been kept.

"May I ask why?" put in Kenyon.

"Well, you know," said Mr. Beaumont with a little nervous laugh, "the fact is, your friend and I belong to the same club; and one night he won some money from me at poker."

Kenyon gave a slight start.

"Oh, you needn't be alarmed! It was only a matter of ten pounds. Vere is no gambler in the proper sense of the word. But I wanted my revenge; and Vere said he would come to my rooms on Tuesday evening and let me win my money back if I could. I was surprised that he did not turn up, that's all."

"You have not seen him since?"

"No, as it happens, I have not."

"You are aware, of course, that he was to have been married last Thursday?"

"Married? No! He never told me."

Harold's heart sank within him as he heard this.

"You are an intimate friend of Vere's, I suppose?" asked the lawyer.

"I think I may say I am his most intimate friend. But I have not seen much of him for the last two years. Perhaps you can tell me——. Did he ever speak to you of a Miss Unwin?"

Mr. Beaumont's face changed. Harold saw it and his heart again misgave him.

"I see you know the woman's name," said Harold.

"I do know her name," said the other, speaking slowly and keeping his eyes fixed on a paperknife which he was twirling in his fingers, "but I'm afraid I can say no more."

A pang shot through Kenyon's breast. Vere had told him nothing of Miss Unwin. This new friend had, apparently, been told everything.

"He told you——?"

"I fear I must ask you to excuse me, Mr. Kenyon," said the lawyer decisively.

"But surely if you can throw any light on his disappearance——"

"His disappearance?"

"Don't you know that he has not been seen or heard of since last Tuesday?"

"Impossible!"

"But it is true."

"I never heard of it. How could I?"

"I forgot. I ought to have told you. But it is true. His marriage was fixed: the bride was actually at the altar. He never came. He has disappeared, without saying a word to any one, without leaving a trace behind him. And—and Miss Unwin has disappeared also—at the same time—on the very same day!"

"Ah!"

"*Now*, Mr. Beaumont, will you tell me what you know?"

"My dear sir, I know nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"I don't suppose that you know where they—where either Mr. Vere or Miss Unwin is to be found," said Harold; "but you know something of the footing on which they stood with regard to each other. You are aware that Vere was well acquainted with this girl?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Do you think it likely that they have eloped together?"

"Well," answered the lawyer, with a smile, "neither I nor anyone else can speak with certainty on such a point; but if you ask me what I think——"

"Yes?"

"I think that if you find Miss Unwin—isn't that the lady's name?—you will find our friend, too."

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The superintendent's opinion, given almost in the superintendent's own words!

Harold paused a moment.

"If I thought *that*, I should trouble myself about him no more," he said; "but I do not believe it."

Mr. Beaumont smiled.

Harold did not like his smile. But there was no more to be said. He left the lawyer's office, and went to Scotland Yard.

The police had learned nothing.

Weary and dejected, Harold went back to Paddington, and set out on the return journey to Davenport.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNWILLING BRIDE.

"SURELY I have waited long and patiently, Kate," said Paul Shenstone to his betrothed.

"Not very long—it is not so long since we were engaged," she answered.

"It seems a century to me. You said last May that our marriage might be in September."

"I—I thought so then; but I could not be married while Winnie Denvers is suffering such an agony of suspense. Poor girl! It is pitiful to see her."

"But if Launcelot Vere chooses not to return at all, am I to lose you altogether?"

"You know very well I did not mean that."

"But you promised me that you would fix some day in September. 'The latter half of the month or towards the end'—these were your very words."

"Yes; but—but I did not think you meant to hold me to them so strictly. We have made no preparations, or hardly any."

"That does not really matter. The great thing is that we should be married."

Kate did not answer.

"I thought you had some respect for your word," said Shenstone, piqued at her silence.

The girl's face flushed at this; yet she did not seem angry. In truth she was too much preoccupied, too anxious, to get angry.

"Mr. Shenstone," she began.

"Mr. Shenstone!" echoed her lover, in a low tone of protest.

Kate disregarded it.

"You must surely have noticed a change in me lately," she went on, her face blushing as she spoke. "The truth is, I do not wish to marry. I would rather—much rather—remain as I am. You know I look on an engagement as a very serious thing, only inferior in sacredness to the marriage tie itself. I do not think that, as a rule, one can be justified in breaking a promise of that kind simply because one's mind has changed. But I confess that I do not love you as I ought—as a wife ought to love her husband. The fault, I admit, is entirely mine. You have never failed in your duty to me—never given me the slightest cause to reproach you in any way. But—oh, Mr. Shenstone! I do wish you would release me from my promise!"

Kate's hands were clasped on her lap, and a proud yet supplicatory look was on her face.

Her lover had turned very pale. He opened his lips; but no word came from them. When he did speak, his voice was low and soft.

"I do wish you would release me from my promise."

"Kate," he said, "we have talked of this before. It seems a pity to recur to the subject. I told you that my very love for you prevented my giving you up voluntarily. It seems to me that it is not fair to ask it. Of course, I am in your hands. I cannot force you to marry me. But really I fail to see the difference between deliberately breaking your promise, and pressing me to give you leave to break it. I love you too well, Kate—I cannot give you up."

The girl made no reply. She sat still, with her hands clasped in front of her. She dared not say a word, for fear of bursting into tears.

Shenstone went on, speaking yet more gently.

"I cannot pretend to be ignorant of the reason for the change in you. But I am convinced that——"

A look from Katharine stopped him. Almost immediately, however, he resumed. It took a good deal to abash Mr. Paul Shenstone.

"Your mother—any person of experience, will tell you, my dear, that the one cure for all those fancies is to get married. If only you would allow me to fix a day! Shall we say the first of October?"

"I am afraid, Paul, our marriage will not be a happy one," said Katharine.

"I think you are mistaken. At all events, nothing shall be wanting on my side to make it a happy one for you. Do you not believe that I love you?"

"Yes; I do believe it."

"Then I will be satisfied with as much as you can give

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me in return. Love will come after marriage; and it will be a far more solid and enduring affection than the kind of thing that often goes by the name."

Kate saw that it was useless to prolong the struggle. She was beginning to understand that one might as well try to upset Snowdon as to turn Paul Shenstone from his purpose. Unless she were to violate her promise, she must yield to him.

"Will you promise me, dearest, that our marriage will take place in the first week of October?" he asked after a few seconds.

"Oh, no, no! Not so soon as that."

"Some time in October, then? You consent? Thank you, dearest. May I say in the first half of the month?"

"No—yes—if you wish it—what does it matter? What difference can a week or two's respite make?" was her unspoken thought.

This conversation had taken place in Mrs. Dale's garden. Shenstone, having gained his point, moved towards the gate; and as Kate saw one of the Rectory servants approaching, she walked on to meet her, thus avoiding a *tête-a-tête* parting with her betrothed. The girl had been sent to say that Miss Winifred would be glad if Miss Dale could come up to the Rectory for half-an-hour.

These messages had been frequent during the last three days. Katharine was so strong, so patient and sympathetic, that Winnie leant upon her, as she could lean on no one else.

Winnie knew that her father loved her dearly; but she could with difficulty keep from showing how his presence, the mere sound of his voice, was to her like a blister on a tender skin. The same thing was true, to a less degree, even of her mother and sisters. They all execrated Vere, and she knew it. They all looked upon her and treated her as the victim of a false, unworthy man. It would have been greater kindness to assume that some misfortune had overtaken him—that Winnie was to be comforted, but not pitied as one who had barely escaped being married to a scamp.

"Kate," she said, "this suspense is more than I can bear."

Kate never made this mistake. She never spoke as if Launcelot were in any way to blame for disappearing as he had done. Indeed, she spoke but little to Winnie at any time. The poor girl seldom cared to talk. It seemed enough for her to sit with one of her friend's hands in her own, sometimes gazing wistfully in her face.

"Kate," she said, as Miss Dale came to her that afternoon, "this suspense is more than I can bear. It will drive me mad. Do you think—he can be *alive*, Katie? Don't you think, dear, if he had been alive, he would have written to me?"

"Certainly, if he could. But you know, my dear, he may be alive, and yet not able to write. I have been thinking—perhaps he met with an accident and was picked up and carried, not to a hospital, but to the house of some charitable person to be nursed. He may be quite unable to write and yet not seriously injured."

"Do you think so, *really*, in your heart? But surely he might have got the nurse or some one to write for him."

Kate sighed, and pressed her friend's fingers in silence.

"And oh, Kate, think—if news should *never* come! If weeks, and months, and years should pass, and no light were to break on my darkness—if I should never hear from Launcelot again, never know what had become of him!"

"My darling, don't think of such a thing. Why torment yourself by picturing the worst. Perhaps, after all, this is merely some freak of Mr. Vere's——" Her voice stopped; the hypothesis was too absurd.

"Do you know, Kate, Miss Unwin has left home suddenly; and papa fancies that Launcelot and she have gone off together! Isn't it too ridiculous?"

"I should think it was the last thing he was likely to do," said Kate evasively.

"Even if he had done so I would forgive him, Kate. Oh, I think I could forgive him *anything*, if only I knew what had become of him!"

Kate's face grew dark and stern. Her heart bled for her friend; and she was beginning to think hard things of Launcelot Vere.

"But I know all about Miss Unwin—Lance told me."

Kate started.

"He met her at Richmond, at Mr. Pascoe's, you know. She is a daughter (or a niece—I forget which) of Mr. Pascoe's housekeeper. When Lance's friend died, Mrs. Unwin found another situation, and the girl came here to be schoolmistress. Lance was quite surprised to see her here; it was quite a coincidence, he said."

Kate found it difficult to make any reply. In her secret mind she had always suspected that her friend's lover had eloped with this Miss Unwin, and the fact that he had spoken of her to his betrothed bride seemed to make things worse, if he were guilty.

After a time she bade her friend good-night. As she came downstairs the Rector met her, and drew her into his study.

"I'm afraid, Miss Dale, there can be no further doubt," he said.

"Have you had news of Mr. Vere?" she asked quickly.

"No; but I have had a letter from Mrs. Unwin. She has heard nothing from her daughter, and is very anxious about her. She seems to have heard of Vere's disappearance, and—but you can see her letter for yourself."

Kate ran her eye over the letter; it seemed to indicate, she thought, that Mrs. Unwin believed that her daughter had eloped with Mr. Vere.

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"It seems to me," said the Rector, "that I ought to insist upon this engagement being definitely broken off. I am surprised that Winnie, poor girl, does not see the matter in the same light. One does not like to insist, you know. But Mr. Shenstone, who seems to be a man of considerable knowledge of the world, with plenty of sound common sense, agrees with me that there is no reasonable doubt about the case. And if that is so, it seems much better that the engagement should be considered at an end. Don't you think so?"

"Don't you think it might be well to wait a few days longer?" suggested Kate. "I don't think Winnie should be troubled at present."

"Then you and Mr. Shenstone don't agree on the subject?"

"I have never discussed it with him," said Kate, blushing a little. "All I say is—Winnie has not yet lost faith in her lover. Do not insist on her repudiating him, dear Mr. Denvers, as long as her trust in him survives. If I might make a suggestion I would say: Do not allude to the subject in any way, and send Winnie away somewhere for a change as soon as she can be persuaded to leave home."

"Perhaps you are right," grumbled the Rector. "But it is very annoying. I should like to be able to tell our friends that we are done with the fellow for good and all."

CHAPTER V.

A Practical Hint.

On Sunday afternoon Harold went over to Wythecombe, and called at the High Cottage, as Mrs. Dale's house was called, to report what he had done in London. He asked for Miss Dale, and was told that she was in the drawing-room.

When he was ushered into the drawing-room he found Mr. Shenstone there before him; and if he could have done so he would have turned on his heel and gone away. He had not yet succeeded in schooling himself so as to endure the sight of these two together with perfect equanimity, and he did not care to discuss the affairs of his own most intimate friend before one who was comparatively a stranger.

Shenstone, however, showed himself to be not wanting in tact. He became interested in a portfolio of engravings at one end of the little drawing-room, and left Kate to talk to her visitor.

"I have learned nothing," said Harold in a low tone, "except that Vere left without luggage. On the other hand, he seems to have had quite enough money with him, for he drew £75 from the bank that day, Tuesday; and I found none in his room—indeed, there was no drawer or desk locked up that I could see. One of his portmanteaux was missing; but possibly Vere parted with it some time ago. He had an engagement for Tuesday night, which he failed to keep. It is as great a mystery to me as ever."

As he had been speaking, Harold had been stripping a flat parcel he carried with him of its covering.

"Do you know that face?" he asked, holding a sketch before Miss Dale.

"It is the schoolmistress, Miss Unwin. Where did you find that? In Mr. Vere's studio?"

Harold nodded.

"I fancy that may be explained," said Kate; and she proceeded to tell him that Miss Unwin had at one time been an inmate of Mr. Pascoe's house. "It is quite likely," she added, "that Mr. Vere met her there, and got her to sit to him as a model."

"Then they may have become intimate. That looks rather as if—Miss Dale," he cried suddenly in a loud tone, "I can't and won't believe it."

"You shouldn't speak so loud if you are talking secrets," said Shenstone in a pleasant tone from his corner.

"I am talking no secrets," said Harold gloomily. "All the world may hear me say it. I don't believe that my friend, Launcelot Vere, has eloped with Miss Unwin. Weak he may be, but he is not a scoundrel. I could understand his being infatuated enough to run away with the girl. But that he should have done so on the very eve of his marriage, and without a word of warning to his bride—that Vere should commit an outrage of that description—no. It is not possible."

"Did you meet with any success in your inquiries?" asked Shenstone politely.

"None at all."

"I wish I could help you, for Miss Denvers' sake for—"

"I thought you were of opinion that the match should be definitely broken off," interrupted Kate.

"Speaking as a friend of Miss Denvers' and of her family, certainly I think so. Mr. Vere's conduct seems to

Kate ran her eye over the letter.

me inexcusable. Even Mr. Kenyon will agree with me in that. But it would be a satisfaction to him, and to us all, to know exactly what had become of Vere; and I shall be very glad to help in clearing up the mystery."

"Well, if you can make any suggestions, I shall be happy to act on them," said Kenyon bluntly.

"You have advertised for news of your friend, offering a reward for any information?"

"No. I don't see how it could do any good."

"It could do no harm, and it might elicit something. I should certainly advertise."

"I will. I ought to have done so sooner. Thank you for the hint. Does anything else occur to you?"

"Well, you know what I suggested before," said Shenstone with a smile—"find the woman."

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"Perhaps you are right," answered Kenyon, after a moment's pause. "I will find Mrs. Unwin's address, and see her at once."

"My dear fellow," said Shenstone, with an amused look on his face, "when a young lady runs away, one does not go to her mother's house to look for her."

Kenyon reddened a little; and Kate came to his relief by saying:

"I fancy Mrs. Unwin is in a situation as housekeeper, or something of that kind, and she does not know what has become of her daughter; she is very anxious about her. Mr. Denvers showed me last night a letter he had from her. She seems to think that—that the circumstances are suspicious."

Harold said nothing, but sat gloomily staring at the carpet.

"Did you make inquiries at Paddington?" asked Shenstone.

"No."

"It might be well to do so—if you wish to ascertain the truth."

There was a suspicion, only a suspicion of a pause in the middle of the sentence; and Kenyon threw a sharp glance at the speaker's face, to see whether he meant to insinuate that he, Kenyon, did not wish to pursue the matter of Vere's disappearance too closely. But Shenstone's face wore its usual composed look, and Harold looked down at the carpet once more.

"I will advertise for news of this Miss Unwin at once," he said.

"Don't you think—I merely throw out the suggestion—that that would be a little premature?" asked Shenstone. He spoke in a hesitating, deprecatory way, as if he feared to give offence by interfering too much. "You see," he added, as Harold looked at him inquiringly, "such an advertisement ought to come from *her*, Miss Unwin's, friends. If she can account for her absence in an innocent, natural way, she might be greatly offended, perhaps injured, by the advertisement. Then the two advertisements, one for Mr. Vere and one for her, appearing together, would be awkward."

"Did you make inquiries at Paddington?"

"True: I did not think of that," said Kenyon.

"I should make inquiries at Paddington, or find out the guards of the trains and question them; or, if necessary, print a few handbills, offering a small reward for information, and circulate them among the railway officials."

Kenyon thanked his rival, and, feeling that he had stayed long enough at the Cottage, he took his leave. He hoped that Katharine would say something about his coming again to report the result of his fresh inquiries; but she either forgot to do so, or purposely omitted to give him any invitation.

"What a clever fellow that is! He thinks of everything," said Harold to himself, as he went down the hill. "It would never have done for me to advertise for Miss Unwin. But I can find out what train she travelled by on Tuesday. I had better do that now."

He turned down a lane which led to the railway-station about a mile from the village. Having reached it, he found a porter on duty; and this man remembered Miss Unwin's leaving on Tuesday forenoon.

"Took a ticket for London, she did," said the man grinning; "and I fancy the guard, a man of the name of Martin, might tell 'ee some more about her. Leastways I heard a man say he believed Martin had been heard talking about her. They do say Martin was a bit sweet on her hisself," added the man with another grin.

"Where can I see this man Martin?" asked Kenyon impatiently.

"You'll have to go to London to see him, sir; for they've given him a small station on the Wycombe branch."

Harold handed the man a trifle and turned away, telling himself that at last he was about to put his finger on the key of the mystery.

(To be continued.)

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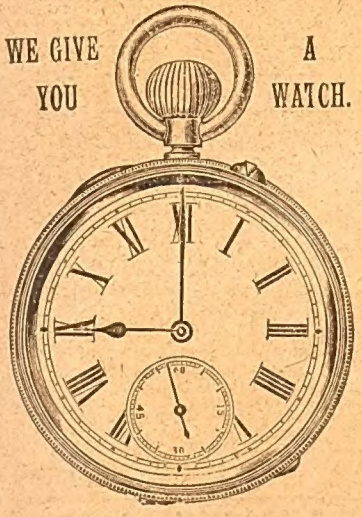

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Any Watch not received in going order will be exchanged.

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We do this to save the enormous cost of advertising, preferring to give our customers the benefit. As we lose money on each parcel we cannot supply more than two parcels to one person. If you cannot call get a P.O. at once, and send for this wonderful parcel. Orders will be executed in Rotation.

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